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An experiment in contextualised comparative hermeneutics:
A reading of Genesis 1-11 in the context of parallel
Qur'anic material and Christian mission amongst Muslims in
Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne.

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Presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Theology, University of Durham.

Ida Jane Glaser
1994



- 1 MAY 1995

An experiment in contextualised comparative hermeneutics:

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Abstract

The context of inter-faith mission requires the Christian both to theologise and to minister on the basis of as much understanding as possible of the faith communities to which (s)he relates. It is inevitable that such understanding should be developed in comparison with one's own faith. If the basis of the Christian faith is seen as being found in the Bible, then the basis of theology will be its interpretation. If, further, the other faith is Islam, then the theologising will be in the context of comparison with the Qur'an.

This thesis presents a response of a specific Christian reading a specific Bible passage in a specific context: of an evangelical Christian woman with Jewish ethnic roots reading Genesis 1v26-11v9 in the context of her ministry amongst Muslims in a mixed inner city area of Newcastle upon Tyne, England. It uses methods borrowed from physical and social sciences to develop a comparative and reflective reading that both recognises the Qur'an as the Book of local Muslim people and transforms the reader and her ministry.

Personal and particular factors are systematically explicated and exploited, and the specific project functions as an experiment which contributes towards a wider model for comparative reading and theology. It raises general questions of interpretation, suggests principles for mission and produces a possible pattern for a contextualised, comparative hermeneutic.



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The victory of the theoretical approach over the experimental lasted as long as a confrontation with reality could be avoided.

Alfvén and Arrhenius 1975, p117

The demands of discipleship are far more daunting than the problems associated with hermeneutical obscurity.

Thiemann 1987, p35

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks to all those who have advised, encouraged and put up with me during the years leading up to the production of this thesis:

Prof E.D.A. Hulmes for his support throughout, and especially for his wisdom in encouraging me to develop my own thinking in my own context. Dr A.L. Loades for taking on the task of supervision in the final stages, and others in the theology department at Durham who have offered criticism and advice.

Various others who have read material and provided reading lists, especially Marc Bregman, Reuven Firestone, Lesslie Newbigin and R.S. Sugirtharajah.

Ellie Bowen, who reminded me that I am a scientist.

Zahida Chaudhry and Rabbi Moshe Yehudai who helped with Urdu and Hebrew.

The St Paul's Elswick Asian Project and CROSSLINKS who let me have time for study, and the Asian Project Review Body and Bishop Kenneth Gill who suggested I consider further study in the first place.

The congregation and leaders of St Paul's Church who have prayed for me, encouraged me, put up with my moods and listened patiently to my sermons on Genesis. A variety of other groups and individuals who have listened and responded to ideas, especially students at Northumbria Bible College.

The family of Mr Miah, who agreed to my including reflections on his murder.

My friends and neighbours in Elswick, and especially the Muslim women and children who have so greatly contributed to my understanding of Islam, and to whom this thesis is dedicated.

Translations and Transliterations

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Qur'an follow the translation of A. Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an: text, translation and commentary, 3rd edition, 1938. Those from the Bible follow the New International Version, Hodder and Stoughton, 1980 edition.

Transliterations from Arabic and Urdu use the same system as the second edition of The Encyclopaedia of Islam, E.J. Brill, 1979 and following, except that the unsounded *ta' marbūtah* (ة) is transliterated "-ah" instead of "-a", *jīm* "j" instead of "dj", *qāf* "q" instead of "k" and *che* "ch" instead of "č".

Hence, for Arabic:

consonants					
ا	'	ض	d		long vowels
ب	b	ط	t	ا	ā
ت	t	ظ	z	و	ū
ث	th	ع	c	ي	ī
ج	j	غ	gh		short vowels
ح	h	ف	f	ـَ	a
خ	kh	ق	q	ـُ	u
د	d	ك	k	ـِ	i
ذ	dh	ل	l		diphthongs
ر	r	م	m	ـَ و	aw
ز	z	ن	n	ـِ ي	ay
س	s	ه	h	يـِ	iiy
ش	sh	و	w	وـِ	uww
ص	s	ي	y		

For Urdu, the following are added:

پ	p	ژ	zh	ٹ	t
چ	ch	ڈ	d	ڙ	r
گ	g	ں	n		

Hebrew transliterations use the same system as G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds), Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, translated by J.T. Willis, W.B. Eerdmans 1974.

1 Introductory

1.1 Introduction

It is simply too late, by several centuries, to try to read the Bible apart from the world religions and their texts. Clooney 1990, p69

If we mean to live in this world, it has to be said that cross-reference theology is the only one that there is. Cragg 1986, p 13.

Many are the hermeneutical models that have been recognised in recent years; many are the approaches to other faiths that have developed as western Christians have had increasing contact with their adherents. For the evangelical¹, committed to Biblical authority, these two facets of theology go together. Questions of response to people of other faiths are primarily questions of what the Bible says about the issue; and questions of what the Bible says are questions of hermeneutics.

What follows is an adventure in understanding a particular passage of the Bible in a particular inter-faith missionary context. It seeks to develop a Biblical understanding of the situation, to address questions raised by the situation to the Bible, and to find ways of making life and ministry conform to Biblical demands. Analysis of the methods developed results in the proposal of a more general model for reading the Bible in the context of inter-faith mission.

The Bible passage is Genesis 1v26-11v9, and the context an inner city area in the U.K. with a substantial minority of South Asians, mainly Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh (see 3.2.2). This implies the "inscribing into the hermeneutic circle" (Clooney 1990 p68) not only of the reader and the social context, but also of the Qur'an as it affects local Muslim people. That is, the adventure moves between comparative textual study and reflective contextual response: it seeks to theologise with reference to the other faith as well as to community and mission.

This process can be labelled "comparative theology". That is, it moves from the attempt to understand an "other" - in this case Islam - to a re-reading of one's own texts and faith which consciously includes the new understanding and seeks a faithful response to it.

Comparative theology differs from comparative religious study in that, as pointed out by Clooney 1993 (p4-5), it is explicitly carried out from the point of view of believers in believing communities. Rather than seeking an "objective" standpoint outside the systems to be compared, the Christian theologian works consciously from within one of them². This takes her or him beyond the attempt to understand how different religions work for their adherents to questions of truth and response.

Comparative theology is also different from contextualised theology, although it can - and perhaps should - be part of it. Contextualisation is understood differently by its various practitioners³, but in general it is an attempt to express the Christian faith in appropriate ways in particular contexts. This can either be done by a person who has been brought up in the context, or by an outsider who has come into it. The latter is a cross-cultural missionary.

Until recently (e.g. Regan and Torrance 1993), contextualisation has been mainly discussed with reference to non-western cultures, contextualisation within western cultures not being perceived as problematic (see also 1.3). The theological education even of Christians from non-western cultures was largely western, so that they faced similar contextualisation problems to western missionaries in seeking to communicate the faith.

There are two possible responses: to translate an old theology into a new context or to risk a new theology in response to another system. A measure of translation is, of course, inevitable but most western evangelicals have consciously worked with a translation model, such as that described by Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989). This sees approaches to contextualisation as being determined by attitudes to the Bible, proposing a spectrum of opinion that gives different

weights to the divine ("supracultural") and the human ("cultural") in Biblical revelation:

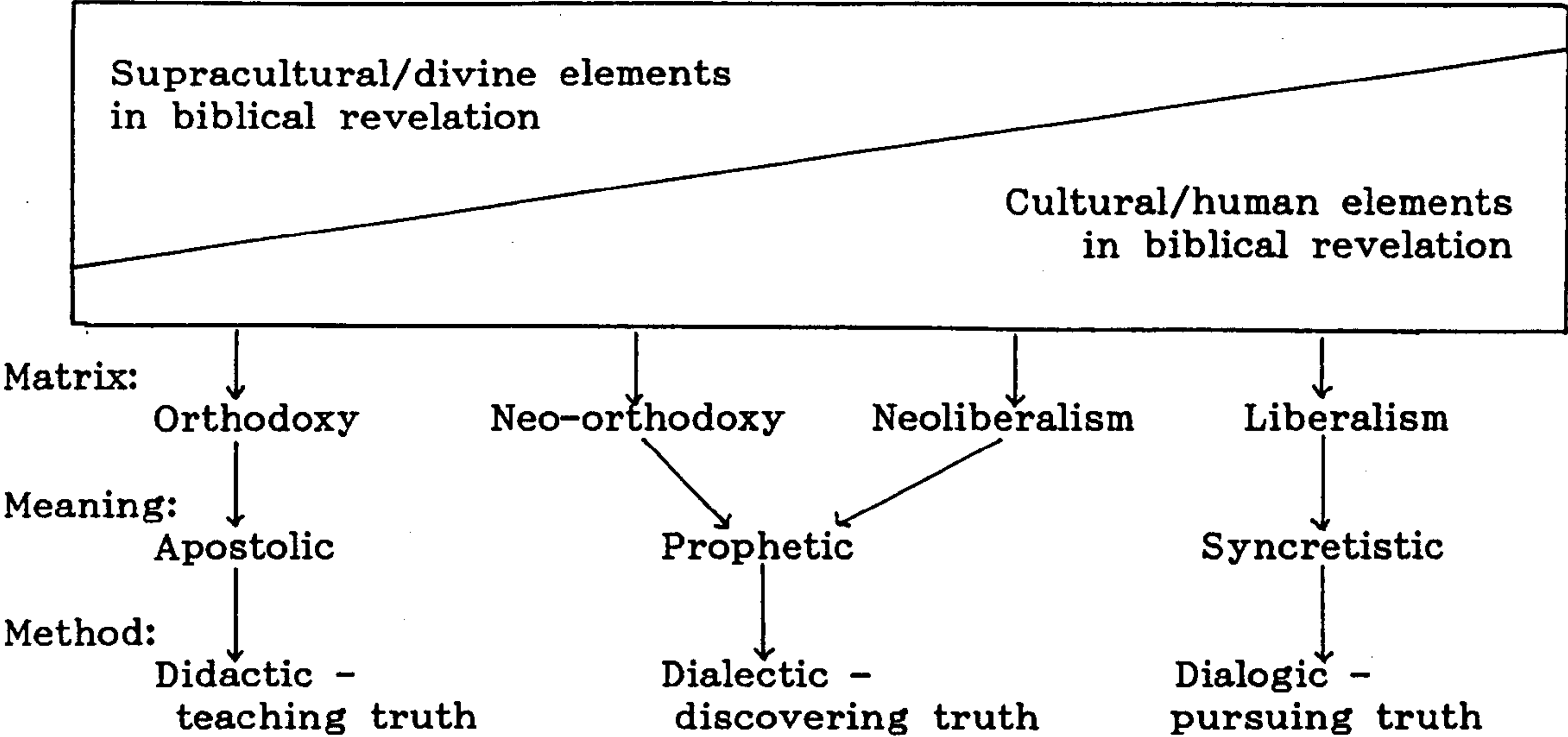


Fig 1 p157

Hesselgrave and Rommen place themselves in the matrix of orthodoxy, and see the hermeneutic task as involving the discernment of supracultural truth through a process of de-contextualisation which is followed by a re-contextualisation of the supracultural into appropriate cultural forms for communication. The model is of a missionary from one cultural background (probably western) abstracting a message from the Bible and re-expressing it for people of another culture (usually non-western). This is described diagrammatically:

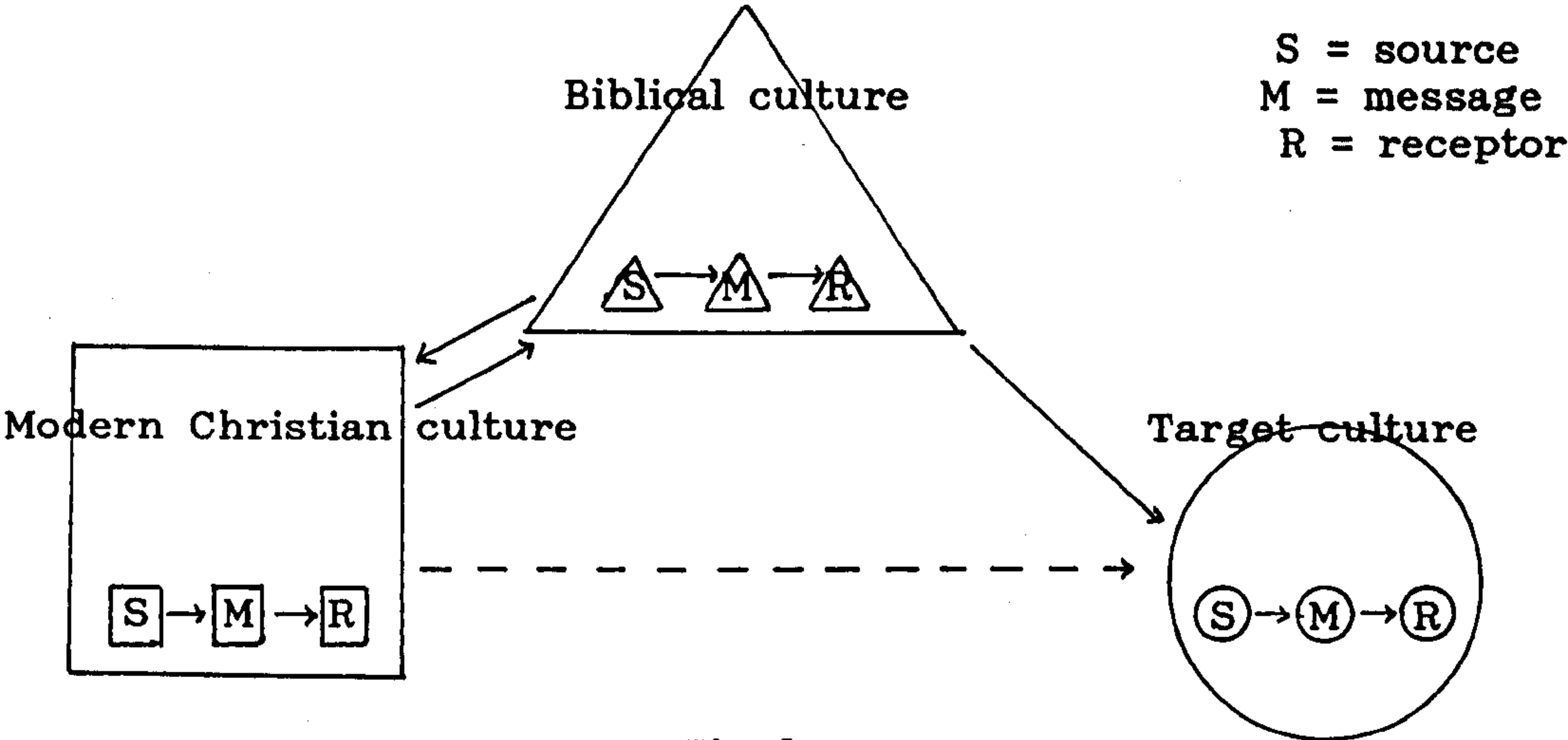


Fig 2 p200

This model developed from a model of Bible translation⁴ which assumes that the hermeneutic work has been completed in the "modern Christian" cultural setting. It ignores the possibility that members of the "target" culture might themselves be interpreting the Bible ⁵, and does not ask whether the missionary's own reading of the Bible might be affected by a new context. Problems arise not only, I would suggest, because of the limited concerns giving rise to the model, but also because of fallacious presuppositions: de-contextualisation is impossible (and undesirable), and the dichotomy between Christian and target cultures is false.

De-contextualisation is unacceptable because the continuum of fig 1 is misleading. It suggests that the Bible is a mixture of cultural and supracultural material, and that differences in theological stances depend on the quantity of material that is considered to be divine. A comparison between Biblical and Qur'anic views of Scripture suggests that it is a Muslim and not a Christian view that insists that divine and human must be in inverse proportion in a sacred writing (2.4 and Glaser 1982a). I would replace the orthodox end of the spectrum with the view that the Bible is 100% human and 100% divine.

The Biblical God is not, then, only supracultural. If the supreme revelation is incarnation, then God revealed is within culture and not just expressing a supracultural self in limited cultural form. It is possible to abstract and translate propositions from the Bible, and, since the Bible contains many propositions, this is necessary. However, just as abstractions from a story cannot replace the story without reduction, propositions about Christ cannot replace Christ Himself. The divine content is inseparable from the human form: abstraction of the supracultural is strictly impossible.

As to the cultural dichotomy: the question is not of starting from a western reading from which the essential message has to be abstracted in order to be translated, but of reading in a cross-cultural situation⁶. It would be possible to import and translate interpretations, but those interpretations have been made in a particular context - whether recognised or not - and the missionary

continues to read in the new context. It then becomes impossible, even if it were desirable, to separate the "modern Christian" and "target" cultures - both have to be taken into account, since the missionary has become part of both.

A contextualised reading of the Bible is, then, at least as important as a contextualised message, and it is the former with which this thesis is concerned. In that both "Christian" and "target" cultures have to be taken into account, it requires a "reading" of missionary as well as of context.

The "reading" of the missionary requires a recognition of the various factors affecting her thinking. It is argued in 1.3 that all knowing is necessarily personal, and that truth can be approached only as this is acknowledged. The thinking of the particular missionary writing this thesis has been affected by a training in science and education, and has led to a methodology that has the explication and exploitation of the missionary's personal involvement as a central feature.

The "reading" of the "target" culture includes both social and religious aspects. The former are explored in 2.5 and 3.2.2. The latter has focussed on a comparison of Bible and Qur'an, and it is in response to this comparison that the reading of the Bible passage has developed.

Although there are many Christians who theologise about other faiths and their relationship to Christianity, or who reflect on Christian ideas in the context of the ideas of other faiths, there are as yet few fellow travellers in the comparative hermeneutic adventure. Material that claims to be comparative often does little more than anthologising or juxtaposing items and ideas from different faiths, with little attempt either to relate them or to see how such an exercise affects Christian thinking⁷. Exceptions include the following three authors, each of whom has concerns in common with the present venture.

Sugirtharajah (1991b and 1993) makes a plea for an "inter-faith hermeneutic", which reads the Bible in the context of other religious texts. He insists on listening to the other text in its own terms rather than starting from a dismissive attitude. His Voices from the Margin (1991a), which introduces a range of Third World hermeneutics, includes a number of brief studies as examples. These are mostly from a liberation perspective, and those that include comparative study are in the context of Hinduism or folk tales and not of the Qur'an⁸.

Cragg (1986), The Christ and the Faiths, explores the need for what he calls "theology in cross-reference" in responding to other faiths. Although this particular book considers several faiths, most of his thinking has developed in the context of Islam. His method is to explore aspects of the other faith that either challenge Christians or provide points of common concern. From this, authentically Christian ways of relating and conversing with adherents of the faiths can be developed.

Clooney (1990 and 1993)'s comparative interest is focussed on texts, and Theology after Vedanta (1993)⁹ treats the Hindu texts as the extended context in which and after which Christian texts are read. While Sugirtharajah presents examples of reading and Cragg seeks principles for faith and faithfulness, Clooney focusses on method¹⁰. He insists on the specificity of his study, and points out that, at least initially in this discipline, such specificity is necessary (pp3, 154, 207). That is, comparisons will be developed by Christian theologians from particular traditions, and with chosen aspects of particular faiths. Each study then functions as an experiment: in the course of time, a multiplicity of experiments may enable more general treatments.

What follows in this thesis is one such experiment. It has arisen out of missiological concern in a particular community, so that it reflects Cragg's passion for faithful response as well as Clooney's for faithful reading. In doing so, it goes behind Cragg's religious concerns to the texts which underlie them, and beyond Clooney's textual study to reflection in missionary context. That it is consciously specific

follows from its nature as an experiment as well as from the methodological considerations of 1.3.

Since it is but an experiment, and therefore moves into a variety of little charted waters, it is as well to start with Clooney's warning (p155):

If one takes seriously the experimental, constructive nature of comparisons, then both the comparativists and their communities will have to be patient with practices that do not yet have refined theoretical justifications. These practices lack such explanations precisely because they are new, and because they need to occur, repeatedly, before it is worthwhile to spend time trying to justify them and reduce them to a smoother, habitual form. When measured against other areas of theology, long established and refined over centuries, comparative theology will seem ill-defined and ill-evaluated. Rather than denying this incompleteness, we need to note carefully the early stage of its development at which comparative theology stands - it is only now identifying texts and how to read them - and to insist that this inaugural practice is not - and ought not to be - turned quickly into perfected theory.

The result of the study will not, then, be a developed system for theologising, but a possible model for reading along with the insights and questions that have been provoked by the process that has been used.

Chapter 1 introduces and schematizes the system within which the research has arisen. It then discusses the methodological background of the researcher and how it might be applied in the particular situation, and proceeds to an account of how the attempt to apply the methodology within the system has led to the current thesis' concerns.

Chapter 2 describes how the comparative contextualised study was set up. This is a retrospective account that seeks to articulate what has been done rather than to prescribe what ought to be done. The analysis provides the framework for the study and thus develops the basis of the hermeneutic.

Chapter 3 presents the contextualised study. Following the postulated methodology, an attempt is made to distinguish between what has been

done, how it has been done, what has been discovered, and what has been argued. It concludes with reflections on implications for mission.

Chapter 4 reflects on how the experiment of chapter 3 might act as a model for a comparative hermeneutic. It also assesses the study, and identifies questions raised by it for future research.

Notes on 1.1

1. For the consciously evangelical approach of this thesis, see 2.1.1-2.
2. D'Costa 1993 argues that an "objective" standpoint is anyway impossible.
3. Bevans (1992) identifies five models, depending on the theologies and concerns of the contextualisers:
 1. The translation model, emphasising scripture and redemption.
 2. The anthropological model, emphasising cultural identity.
 3. The praxis model, emphasising social change.
 4. The transcendental model, focussing on the theologian as the articulator of faith rather than on the content of the theology.
 5. The synthetic model which seeks to keep all this in balance.
4. Fig 2 above was reproduced from Nida, E.A., Message and Mission, Harper and Row, 1960. Nida's primary concern was Bible translation. See also the approach of Kraft 1979.
5. This is understandable in the particular situations for which the model was developed, where members of the "target" culture have as yet had no contact with the Bible.
6. 2.2 argues that every Christian reading of the Bible is in the context of some competing system, whether recognised or not.
7. See Wasserstrom 1993 for a discussion of this with particular reference to Denny and Taylor 1985 and Graham 1987.
8. The difference this makes is explored in 2.2.2.
9. I am indebted to Dr Sugirtharajah for directing me to this book.
10. This will be further explored in 4.2.2.

1.2 The system

The system is defined by the area in Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne, described in 3.2.2 below. The residents include Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as their British-born children, students from a variety of countries, long-established white residents and other white people who have moved into or around the area. It is known as one of the most "deprived" areas of the U.K., with high unemployment and crime rates and a plethora of environmental and social problems.

The local church is small, with a committed membership of about 40. It is mixed socially and educationally, and has members from non-Anglo-Saxon but not Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds. As part of this system and a member of this church employed to facilitate relationships with the Asian communities, the researcher has sought to be faithful to her calling as a missionary member of the church of Jesus Christ.

The Christian context is the evangelical tradition, which implies a reliance on the Bible as the authoritative Word of God (see 2.1.2). The Bible has therefore been used as the yardstick for faithfulness, and concern about the process of reading has become the focus of the research. It is therefore the starting point for schematising the system.

Within the evangelical tradition, Bible reading usually has a personal focus. That is, the emphasis is on the individual's reading and response. We might show this thus:

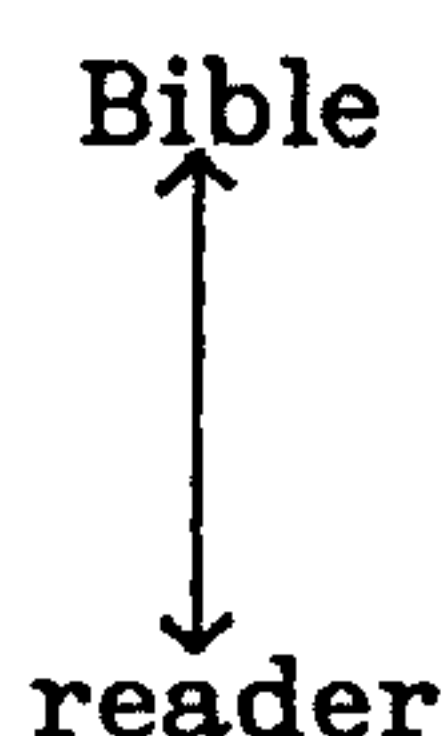


Fig. 1

This is generally extended to reading with other Christian people, either in groups or through learning from more learned individuals. That is, the individual reads the Bible in the context of the church:

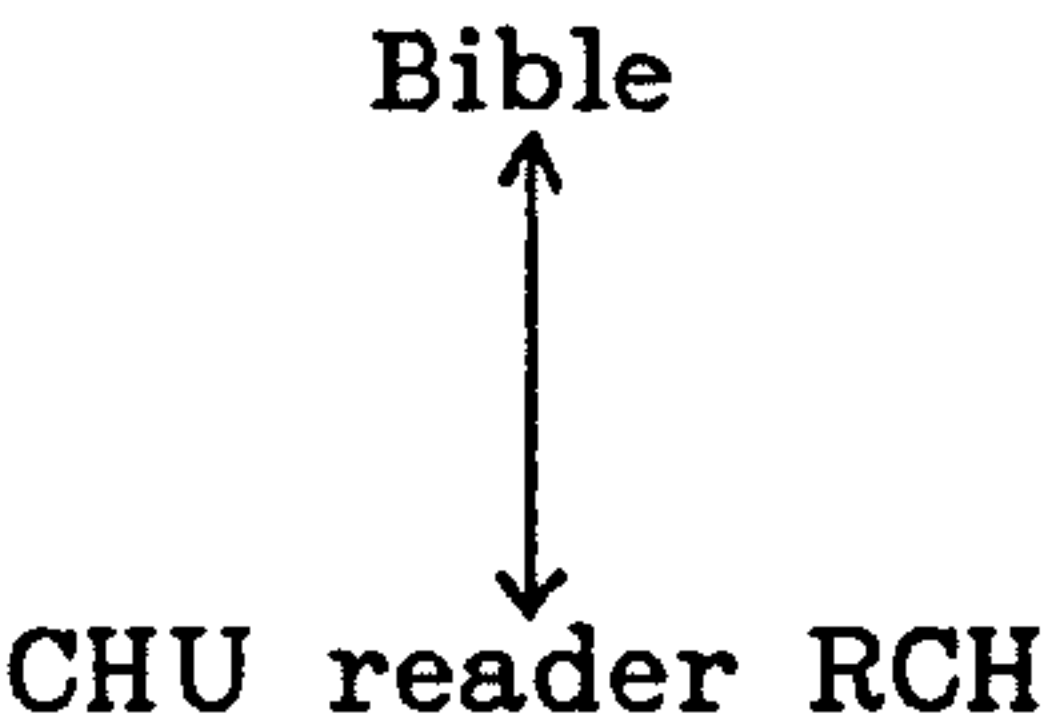


Fig. 2

For theologians, the reading community is likely to be more one of scholarship than one of faith, although recent writers stress the need for the latter as well as the former (e.g. Fowl and Jones 1991).

However, the Bible reading community is not the whole community in which the reader is located. The church reads in the wider context, which in this case includes Muslims and a variety of others:

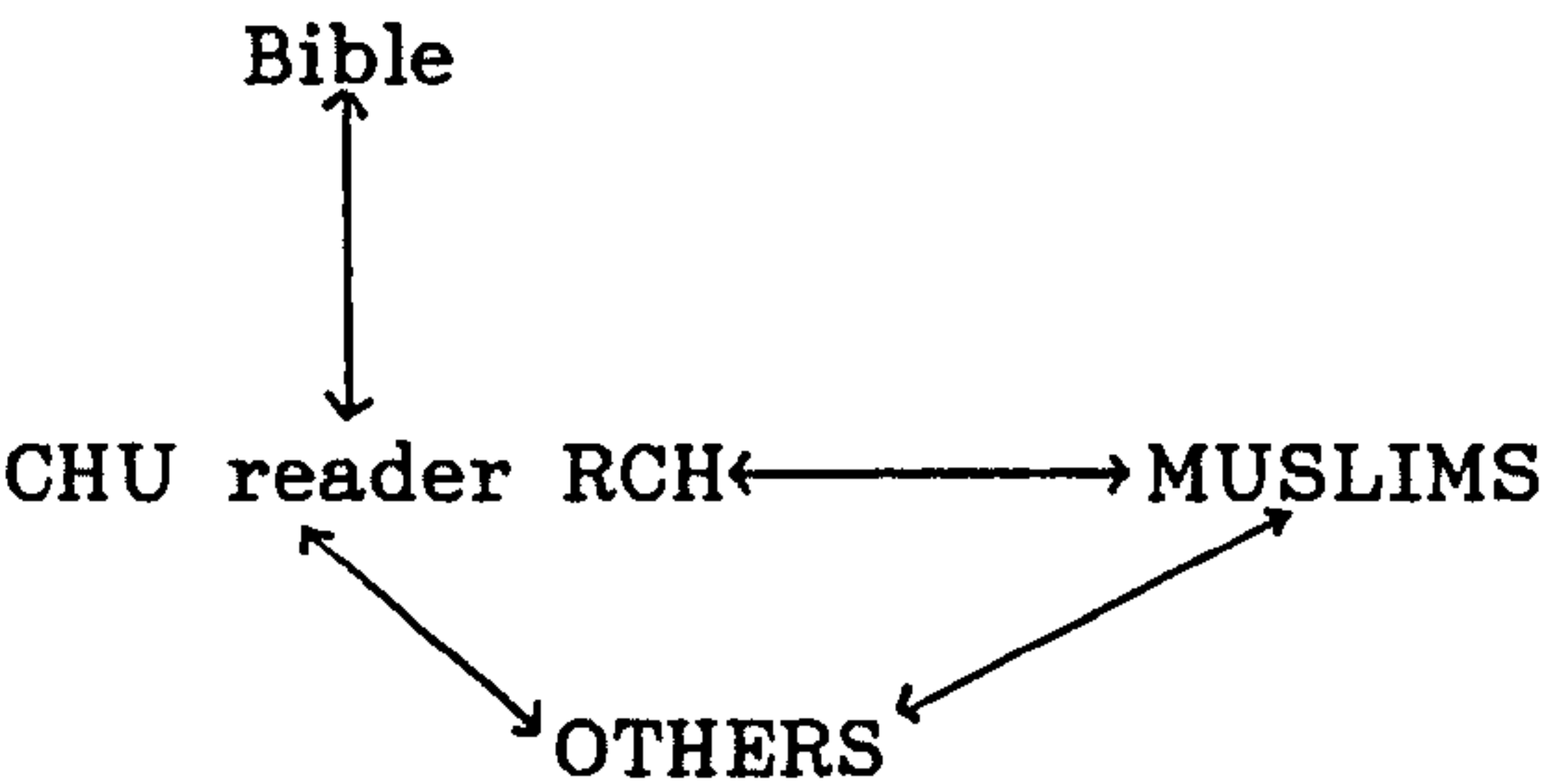


Fig. 3

The introduction of Muslims to the scheme necessitates the acknowledgement that they have a different system of belief which is largely determined by their own Book:

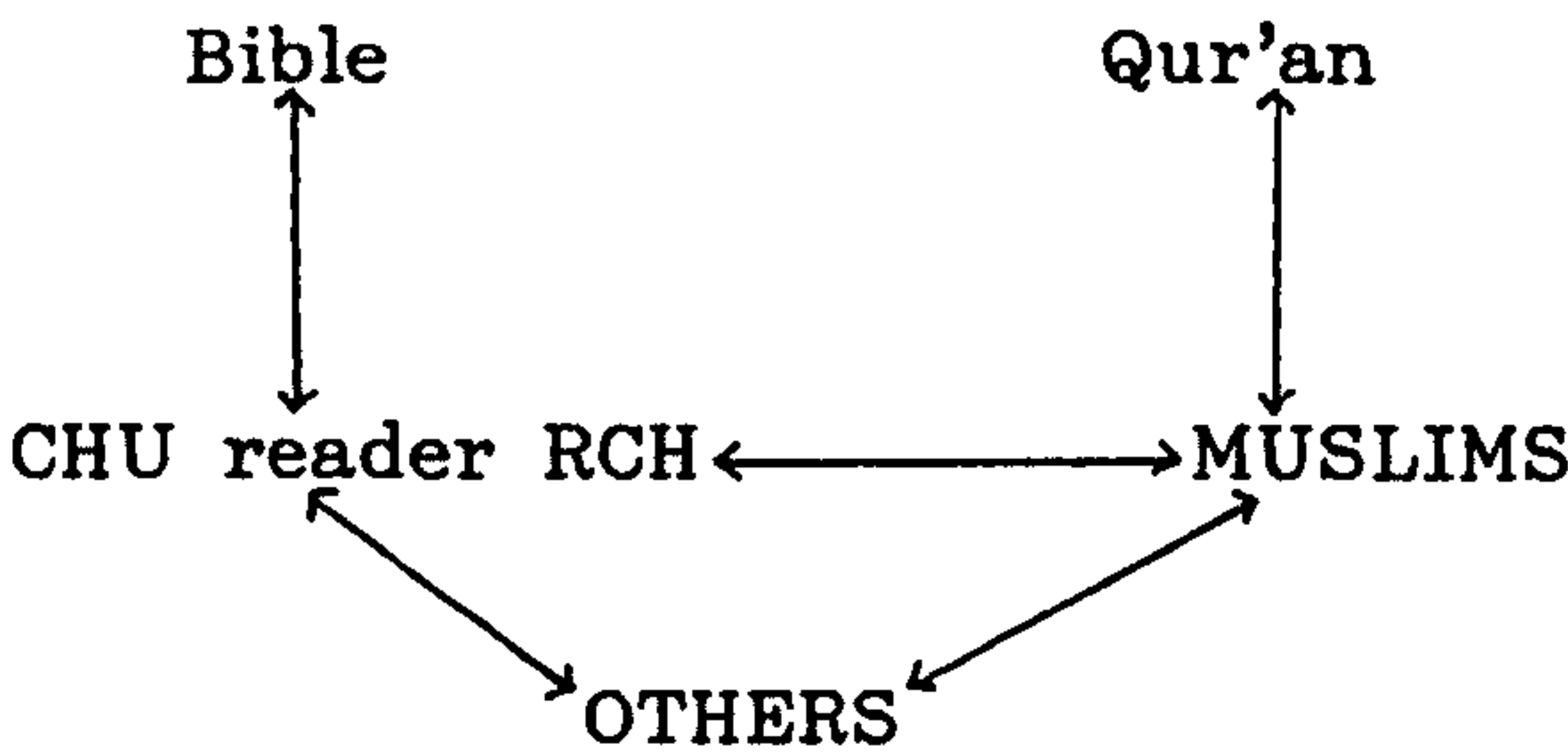


Fig. 4

This, then, is a map of the system in which the study is to be carried out. The study, however, modifies the relationships between the parts. It grows from the missionary motivation which seeks to let the Bible speak not only to those within the church, but also to the rest of the community to the Muslims in particular. This implies a modified fig 3:

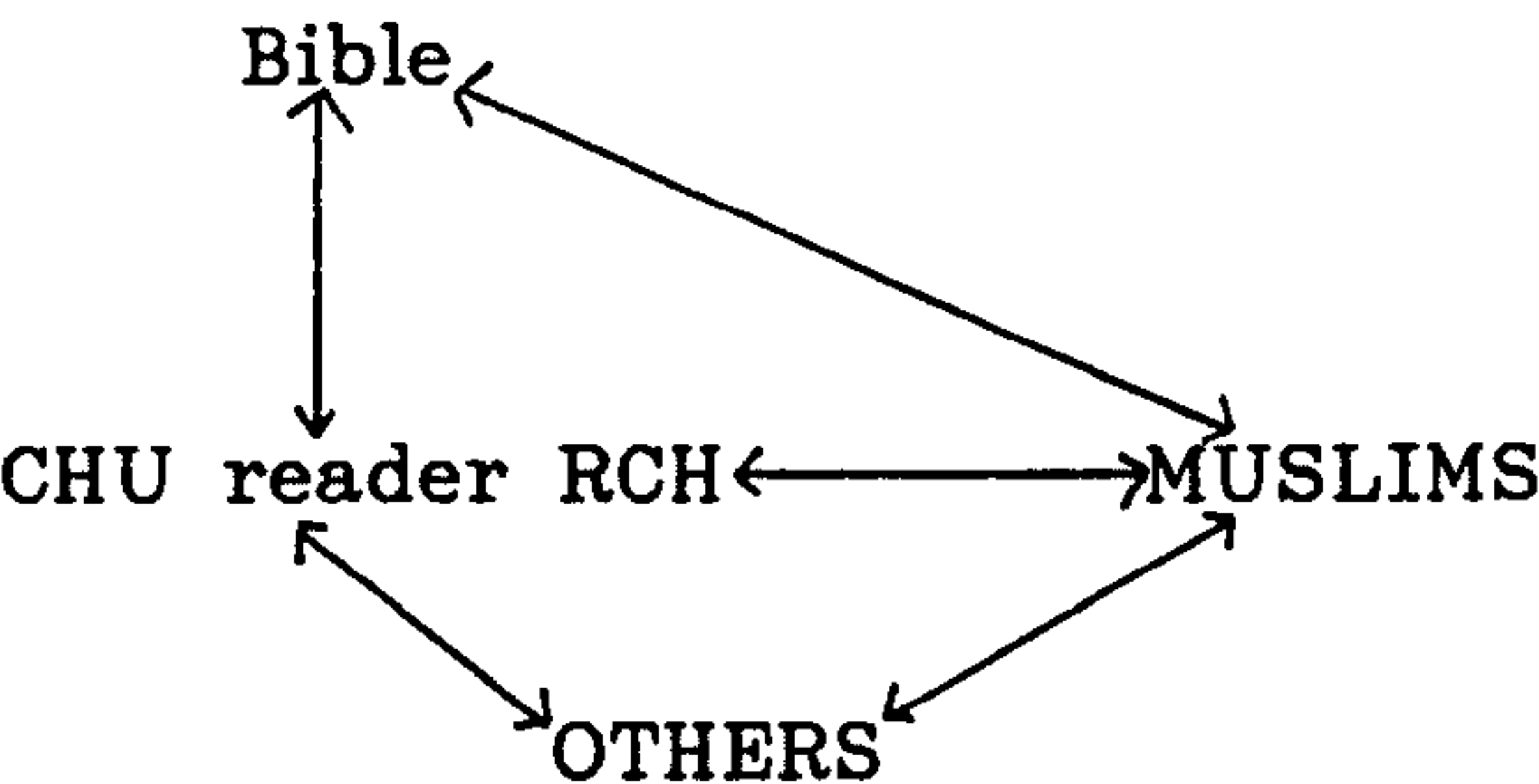


Fig. 3a

There are growing numbers of studies which seek to move from Fig. 2 to Fig. 3 or 3a, asking questions about contextualised Bible reading and appropriate ways of communicating the Biblical message into different communities¹, but there is little that seeks to do this in the light^{of} the sacred books of other communities². I propose to use a comparative study of Qur'an and Bible as a key to relating the parts of the system. That is, the Bible will be read alongside the Qur'an as well as in relationship to the local community. Diagrammatically, this implies a modified Fig 4:

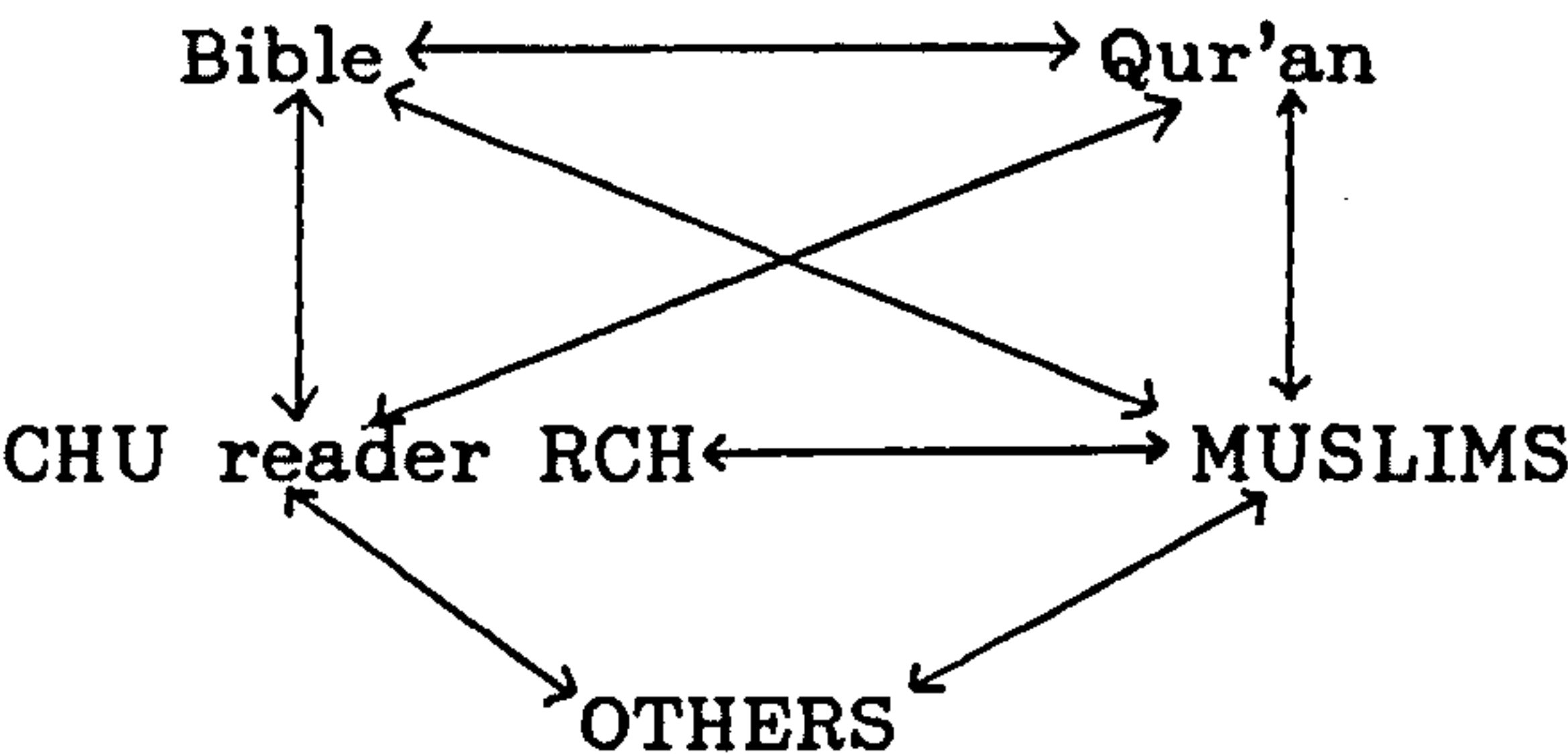


Fig. 4a

The system is complex, not least because, as the bi-directional arrows suggest, it is dynamic. Although the Bible and the Qur'an are fixed, the people are constantly changing as a result of interactions within the system. There are also people moving in and out of the area.

Further, there are many aspects of the system not included in the scheme. It is not only the church that comprises a variety of people: the Muslim communities are also varied (see D in 3.2.2), as are those who would identify with neither church nor mosque. There are also many authorities that compete with both Bible and Qur'an, and many groups other than the church that are working to improve the area.

Finally, the system is not closed. It exists in the wider context of the city, the U.K. and the world, all of which impinge on it - whether through people who come into the area to work, through the media and the politicians, or through the many international events that affect local communities. More importantly, the diagram needs a third dimension - that of the triune God who relates to every part of His world. Through the Holy Spirit, He is the key both to the existence and the interpretation of the Bible. It is not easy to analyse His role in the study, but it is important to acknowledge it; for without this third dimension it is meaningless.

With these provisos, diagram 4a has been used as a working map of the system within which the study has been carried out. The focus of the study and the questions that have been raised have developed during the course of the work through the application of methodological considerations. These latter will therefore be discussed before introducing the former.

Notes on 1.2

1. For example, Brown 1984, Hesselgrave 1989, Kraft 1979, Ro and Eshenaur 1984.
2. For exceptions, see on Clooney and Sugirtharajah in 1.1.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Personal knowledge

While western evangelicals tend to use a translation model for contextualisation (see on Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989 in 1.1), non-western theologians point out that much theology is already contextualized into western culture, and call for theologies developed in their own contexts¹.

It is worth quoting at length from the Seoul Declaration, a summary document from a consultation of Third World evangelical theologians:

Western theology is by and large rationalistic, moulded by Western philosophies, preoccupied with intellectual concerns, especially those having to do with the relationship between faith and reason. All too often, it has reduced the Christian faith to abstract concepts which may have answered the questions of the past, but which fail to grapple with the issues of today. It has consciously been conformed to the secularist worldview associated with the Enlightenment. Sometimes it has been utilised as a means to justify colonialism, exploitation, and oppression, or it has done little or nothing to change these situations. Furthermore, having been wrought within Christendom, it hardly addresses the questions of people living in situations characterised by religious pluralism, secularism, resurgent Islam or Marxist totalitarianism. . . . If Evangelical theology is to fulfil its task in the Third World it must be released from captivity to individualism and rationalism of Western theology in order to allow the Word of God to work with full power.

Ro and Eshenaur 1984, p23

The major criticism is of the so-called rationalistic, "scientific" basis of Western theology, that apotheosizes human intellect and loses both the power and the invisible dimension of the Gospel. Insofar as the critique is true, western theology is, as will be argued below, not being faithful even to its own roots. On the other hand, it is not possible to dismiss 2,000 years of Christian history and to start afresh. It is not, moreover, desirable, in that Christians from all cultures are part of a world-wide Church. Both western and non-western contributions matter.

This is particularly obvious in the Elswick context, which includes both materialistic, rationalistic thinking westerners and more traditional thinking Muslims. The situation is then complicated by interactions between the various groups. Many Muslims are

developing "western" thinking through their experience of British culture. On the other hand, few white residents in the inner city can be considered rationalistic. Many are involved in occult practices that recognise spiritual powers, and Christians seek increasing awareness of the spiritual realm.

Theology here, then, must neither be contextualised only into western thinking, nor only into non-western thinking, but into both. The challenge is to develop a way of reading the Bible that listens to both "east" and "west" in the context of the Elswick system.

In seeking to do this I have drawn on insights from my own intellectual history. This I have done not by choosing how to approach the problem, but by recognising my accustomed ways of thinking and choosing to exploit rather than change them. As stated in 1.1, the "reading" of the missionary is a prerequisite for the missionary reading: this recognition turns out to be consistent with the methodology that develops from it.

A major determinant is a scientific background that affirms the critique of rationalism of the Seoul Declaration. In particular, my understanding of the scientific enterprise has been influenced by Popper (1972) and Polanyi (1953), which leads me to suggest that western thinking should largely agree with this non-western critique (see Glaser 1979 chapter 4).

It is not only that, as Schneiders (1991, p2) points out, a so-called scientific approach to the Bible does not access its most important dimensions. It is also that, from its own philosophical viewpoint, a detached rationalistic - or "objective" - approach to any subject is as impossible as, from other viewpoints, it is undesirable.

That research is inevitably personal has been demonstrated by Polanyi (1953). This is even more important in theology than in, for example, physics, since the theologian not only affects and is affected by the system studied: (s)he is also part of it. While the physicist

transcends what (s)he studies, the object of theology transcends the theologian.

To the western mind, this constitutes a problem, the personal and transcendent nature of the study being seen as hindering access to truth. Some would even conclude that theology and the so-called "exact" sciences are quite different activities, the latter dealing with facts, and the former with opinions. That is, science is thought to be objective, and theology to be subjective. Thus, for example, physics theories are expressed in impersonal terms: it seems that, in criticising a theory, we are criticising something outside ourselves. In theology, on the other hand, statements usually imply personal commitment and might therefore appear to be in a different category than scientific theory².

The attempt to distinguish between subjective and objective has been characteristic of much current western thinking. The subjective - looking at things from our own point of view - and the objective - seeking to eliminate personal factors to distinguish external reality - are both thought to be valid in their own spheres. Yet they are perceived as different, perhaps mutually exclusive, ways of knowing.

Polanyi's (1953) analysis shows that not even in mathematics can the subjective and the objective be separated in this way. He concludes that true knowledge is not so much subjective or objective as personal. That is, all knowing necessarily involves the "passions" and "commitments" of the knower, but can at the same time be knowledge of an outside object:

In so far as the personal submits to requirements acknowledged by itself as independent of itself, it is not subjective; but in so far as it is an action guided by individual passions, it is not objective either. It transcends the disjunction between subjective and objective.

p300

Passions here are not so much sets of preconceptions and assumptions as convictions that drive sincerity:

No sincere assertion of fact is essentially unaccompanied by feelings of intellectual satisfaction or of a pervasive desire or a sense of personal responsibility.

p27

It is instructive here to ask whether God is subjective or objective in His knowledge of the universe. The answer is, I think, that He is both. He is objective in that He is outside and over against the system He has made; and He is clear-sighted, so that what He perceives is the exact truth about what exists. However, He is also subjective in that He has a personal concern as Creator and Owner of the system, and relates with it in a two-way relationship that affects Him as well as it³. His passion here is what we call love for His world⁴.

Further, His personal perception must surely be truth by definition. We can have no higher criterion by which to judge truth. In other words, we can define true knowledge as seeing what God sees and how He sees it. God's way of knowing can then supply a model for our search for knowledge, and His "transcendence of the disjunction between subjective and objective" gives further ground for agreeing with Polanyi here.

Polanyi goes on to analyse the concept of commitment, which he describes as "a personal choice, seeking, and eventually accepting, something to be impersonally given, while the subjective is altogether in the nature of a condition to which the person in question is subject." (p302: the discussion of commitment is in chapter 10.) He points out the necessity of some kind of commitment, the link between its personal nature and its universal intent, and the need to hold firmly to it whilst also acknowledging the possibility of error.

In the area of theology, this concept is particularly important. Not only is one committed to (perhaps unrecognised) cultural and personal presuppositions: the Object of study demands personal response. The theologian may be Christian, Muslim, atheist or agnostic, but he or she will have some position regarding relationship with God, and will hold that position with some passion.

It is sometimes supposed that commitment to any one faith makes impossible the unbiased study of either that or another faith. The insight that all study is carried out on the basis of commitment, and

that a strong and acknowledged commitment is the most satisfactory basis for seeking truth, provides the possibility of an honest way forward. The alternatives are a pretence of objectivity that only makes personal commitment more difficult to assess, a limitation to the kind of research in which such commitment is of minimal importance, or a retreat into the subjective that results in abandoning belief in external truth.

The problem is not, then, that our knowing is necessarily subjective or biased, but that the persons doing the knowing are all - unlike God - imperfect. This also needs to be acknowledged and striven against - in theological terms, repentance is the first step towards recognising truth: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The parallel in physical science is error analysis (see 1.3.2).

"Objectivity" is, then, impossible. All our knowing is affected by ourselves, and is governed by our personal commitments. However, in that there are external objects, people and ideas against which personal knowledge may be measured, complete "subjectivity" is not inevitable. It is possible to move towards knowledge that can be called "true" as both personal commitments and external constraints are acknowledged.

The foundation for the method developed in this study is such acknowledgement. The theologising will be done as far as possible on the basis of explicit statement and exploitation of the passions and commitments of the researcher.

Such passions and commitments are not only those of the individual, but also of the group or groups to which (s)he belongs. They include cultural programmings as well as beliefs and attitudes developed through education and living in communities. The present writer's approach to seeking truth has been affected by academic and professional experience, particularly in the areas of education and the physical sciences. To these we now turn.

1.3.2 Clues from the physical sciences

Characteristic of the physical sciences is a way of looking for truth. It starts with a recognition that truth exists about a system that is independent of personal opinion about or observation of that system, and proceeds to a search for that truth that recognises, allows for and even makes use of personal factors. It then seeks ways of testing results.

We start with an object of research⁵. In the sciences, this is part of the physical world. In theology, it is likely to be a more complex system, including individuals, communities, experiences, beliefs, and scriptures. In this study, it is the system of 1.2. The objects as well as the objectives of study determine the methods used.

We then work on the assumption - in Polanyi's terms, the commitment - that truth exists about the system. Here, there are facts about people, their relationships and their beliefs that are true whatever the perceptions of the researcher. Further, there are facts about God and His relationships with human beings that are also independent of personal opinion and perception⁶. Research proceeds on the basis of this commitment and according to rules of reasoning implicit in the culture of the researcher.

In the physical sciences, commitments and ways of reasoning are seldom specified or questioned, but attempts are made to allow for personal limitations and interactions with the system. In particular, it is usually possible to take quantitative account of personal and instrumental factors, to maximise accuracy of measurement, estimate errors and test inferences. Researchers therefore describe apparatus and procedures, state results and limits of reliability, estimate and analyse errors, and distinguish between data and inference. This enables others to assess results and to both consider the researcher's inferences and make their own.

Where the interaction between the researcher and the object of research is mental, emotional and even spiritual, the effects of and on the researcher are more complex and more difficult to define, let

alone to quantify. It is therefore the more urgent that they are explicitly acknowledged. This study, then, will seek to use the methods developed in the sciences by

Specifying and allowing for personal factors influencing the study.
Stating limitations of accuracy and completeness in the collection of data.

Distinguishing between questions asked, data obtained, use of data and inferences drawn.

Seeking appropriate tests for any conclusions.

However, it is also necessary to recognise that interaction between observer and system is mutual: the system affects the observer, but the observer also affects the system. In the physical sciences, recognition of the latter has sometimes proved fruitful: for example, the quantum theory uses the quantitative recognition of the inevitability of observation changing the system. This recognition is formalised in the uncertainty principle. A classic qualitative version states:

There is a limit to the fineness of our powers of observation and the smallness of the accompanying disturbance - a limit which is inherent in the nature of things, and can never be surpassed by improved technique. Dirac 1958 p3

Physicists have built a whole theory from the analysis of interaction of observer and system⁷. It has proved so powerful that many now suppose that the uncertainty is not only epistemological but also ontological - that the effects of the interference reflect something that is true of the system in itself, and not only limitations of knowledge.

The following section, on educational research models, will suggest ways of exploiting mutuality of interaction in the present study. Here, it is perhaps helpful to reflect that, for the theologian, interaction is not so much a problem to be eliminated or a useful tool in the pursuit of truth as an essential aim of the enterprise. This is because theology is not only about knowledge, but also about obedience. Recent publications make this point in the context of Biblical studies, where it is now common to see the aim of reading as

the transformation of readers and communities (e.g. Thiselton 1992, Schneiders 1991, Fowl and Jones 1991).

In missiology in particular, the overall aim is not just to understand mission, but to make it more effective⁸. It is a premise of mission that the Gospel should be communicated, and that response to it is not a matter of indifference. Through it, God wants to save people, and therefore to change them.

The study, then, should change the researcher and, through her, the system. Personal involvement is not a problem, but a major purpose of the exercise. It may be that, in theology too, the inevitability of interaction reflects a truth about human beings and God.

1.3.3 Clues from educational research

In the social sciences, interactions between observer and system are more obvious than in the physical sciences. While some sociologists seek to be "scientific" and look for quantitative results, others contend that qualitative methods are more appropriate to the study of human beings. They focus on interactions between people, on peoples' own perceptions of themselves and their circumstances and on the ordinary development of social order. Bilton et al (1987 p548) explain such reactions to positivist sociological models:

Far from seeking ways to remain objective, then, the real problem for the anti-positivist is how to become involved enough to understand.

One way of doing this is to not only recognise the inevitability of involvement, but seek to observe from within. The technical term is "participant observation". This may help the observer to understand the system: the problem is that it increases his or her effect on it. Whether or not this is desirable depends on whether it is considered that sociologists should aim at change⁹.

Theology is somewhat different. First, the theologian does not change the system by becoming part of it: to be human is to be part of the system. Second, it has been argued above that theology should aim at transformation. This suggests the use of a model from education: that of curriculum evaluation as action research.

Curriculum evaluation is about finding out what is happening during the delivery of a curriculum and deciding on its merits. It is done in the context of curriculum development, which seeks to improve the education process. In parallel, this study is done in the context of mission, with the aim that Christian life and mission be more faithful.

Both the educational and the theological exercises are difficult. First, finding out what is happening is difficult because of the personal nature of education, and of response to God and to people. Both systems are complex and changing; and each particular situation - whether school or parish - is unique. There can be no question of attempting the repeated, controlled experiments characteristic of the sciences. In fact, the most important factors in both systems are the unique individuals who comprise them.

Then, evaluation is difficult because it implies comparing what happens with what "ought" to be, and this involves defining objectives. In education, a curriculum must be limited and can have defined objectives. The problem is that it is not always easy to find appropriate tests to assess the meeting of objectives: this can lead to objectives being limited to those that can be stated in testable, behavioural terms. The problem then is that many things happen during the delivery of a curriculum that are outside the stated objectives, and that anyway it is difficult to express all desired outcomes in such terms.

More importantly, it is not always obvious what objectives should be set. The setting up of the problem is arguably the greatest area of personal involvement: observation depends on decisions about what to observe, and the framing of questions on views of what is profitable and what is important.

One way of dealing with all this in the educational context is to see evaluation as part of the process of curriculum development, in what has been called the "research model" (see Stenhouse 1975 chapter 9). The evaluation focuses on the study of the situation and its problems rather than on assessing proposed solutions, and the curriculum

develops through responses to what the evaluator has discovered. This leads to a spiral model of curriculum development, in which evaluation leads to change, which is implemented and then evaluated, leading to further change¹⁰. Such interaction between research and system is called "action research".

This type of research does not proceed from a set of questions via a definite method to a set of answers. Rather, it allows findings to challenge preliminary questions so that both objectives and methods of research develop in response to what is discovered. The identification of the "right" questions is a result rather than an initial input¹¹.

The "rightness" of the questions suggests desirability and profitability. That is, it has to do with value and purpose. Here, the theologian has an advantage over educationalist and physical scientist. While the latter have to look outside their spheres of study for values, theology deals with values in itself. It can therefore be expected to determine its own direction in a way that science and education cannot. In particular, the reading of the Bible can be expected to both suggest objectives for mission and provide principles for reading. The study will therefore be spiral in its development of method as well as in its development of understanding and of response.

The action research model implies using theologising not only to illuminate the context but also to interact with it. Conscious effort is therefore made to monitor the effect of the research on the system, to feed the results back into the system¹², and to observe how it changes. This has been much more problematic than initially envisaged.

First, it has seldom been possible to assess the results of feedback. It might have been possible to investigate the development of attitudes through questionnaire or interviewing techniques, but the fluid situation and the personal nature of ministry has meant that it has not been possible to identify a particular group with whom it would have been appropriate to work in this way.

Second, changes in the system have a long time scale, and the researcher has no control over them in the way that a teacher has over the classroom. She also has little control over opportunities for feedback or over events that might test ideas.

Finally, there are constraints of confidentiality. This is particularly important in a ministry based on relationships, and in a community dealing with sensitive issues. Many Muslim women are shy of the public eye for religious and cultural as well as personal reasons; and problems arising from the possibility of conversion to Christianity add further constraints.

Because of all this, reporting on the feedback system has been limited to the records of sermons and responses to them in Appendix II. However, despite these limited records, the research model has been an intrinsic part of the study method, and one of the determinants of how the research has developed.

It has already been noted that the theologian is inevitably part of what (s)he studies. That is, the system to be observed and improved includes the researcher and her activities. In the present study, the fact that the researcher is also the missionary suggests another educational parallel: that of the teacher as researcher (see Stenhouse 1975 chapter 10).

This model recognises that participant observation might best be done by an observant participator. In education, the teacher may be the most appropriate observer of her own classroom. Further, as much research aims to improve teaching, the teacher has a particular interest in developing her own work. This is the spiral model in miniature, as the teacher observes, reflects on and responds to her own teaching.

The involvement of the teacher has the advantage that the unrepeatable nature of the situation is not a problem but a feature of the research. It is, of course, difficult to monitor one's own actions and attitudes: the subjectivity problem arises again. Stenhouse (1975

p157-8), however, points out that the aim of classroom research is to improve teaching, and that the teacher's personal perception is of central importance since (s)he is in a position of control. His conclusion is similar to that reached through consideration of Polanyi:

We are concerned with the development of a sensitive and self-critical subjective perspective and not with an aspiration towards an unattainable objectivity . . . Illusion, assumption and habit must be continually tested . . . The problem is one of awareness.

In the classroom context, techniques have been developed to aid such sensitivity (see Nixon 1981) . Further, teachers do not study their classrooms in isolation, but share observations with other teachers, and sometimes with others who work with them.

As well as feeding back research into the system, I have considered myself as a 'teacher-researcher' in my own local context. That is, I have aimed at responding to what I have learnt in the context of my ministry and thus at both transforming the ministry and testing and extending the learning. Personal involvement is then a feature and not a problem in the research. Thus the Biblical stories are not only to be understood through study of text and commentaries, but also by teaching and obeying them. Interactions with those taught have both been part of the ministry and aided understandings of the stories.

Implementation of the "teacher as researcher" model runs into fewer problems than that of the "research model", since I have access to my own ministry and responses. However, it runs into similar problems of confidentiality, so that a number of relevant interactions cannot be reported. They are, however, as important in the development of ideas as are the apparently more objective ways in which the ideas are justified.

1.3.4 In conclusion

It might seem that a scientific approach and one based on personal commitment must be mutually exclusive. Further consideration shows that even the physical sciences can never proceed via detached observation, since both observation and inference are dependent on

the scientist. Involvement and commitment are inevitable: what is needed is that they be recognised, allowed for and even exploited.

At the same time, theological considerations suggest that involvement is essential to valid theology. This brings us back to the non-western theologians, and their insistence on theologies that are relevant and effective within their contexts. A Chinese theologian comments:

The context is not simply an objective realm of value, things, people or situations. Rather, it is concretized and encountered in the life experience of the theologian. The context is reflected in his feeling, thinking and perception. So the key lies in the theologian himself . . . He, therefore, should embody the questions and issues of his time.

Chow 1984 p89

And an Indian theologian:

Asian theology cannot afford to be purely academic and philosophical. Theology is not valid if it is produced primarily in the study between piles of books. It must be produced in the laboratory of life where it is put to test each day.

Athyal 1984 p55

The inevitability of involvement and the call to obedience are, it seems, two sides of the same coin. This study therefore aims to combine the "scientific" attempt to allow for personal factors with the missiological concern for making the theology affect the system and the personal mandate to move from knowledge to obedience. That is, as well as the study being "studiously and stubbornly particular" (Clooney 1993 p4) it will be studiously and stubbornly personal in that it will both make personal considerations as explicit as possible and exploit personal involvement at every opportunity.

Notes on 1.3

1. This is understood differently by people with different theological starting points. See Lim's (1994) account of the different approaches of the (evangelical) Asia Theological Association and some of the groups sponsored by the World Council of Churches. These are respectively represented by such publications as Samuel and Sugden 1983 and Pobee and Wartenburg-Potter 1986.
2. Newbigin (1986, chapter 1) traces the fact/value dichotomy back to the Enlightenment. Bilton et al (1987, p605) see it as established in their discipline through early 20th century positivist thinking.
3. This is a Biblical view of God (see N11 on 3.4.3). For the Christian, it is epitomised in God's involvement in incarnation. Muslims usually deny that God can be affected by human beings.
4. I am indebted to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin for pointing this out.
5. For a discussion of science and theology as similar activities, with particular reference to objects of study, see Polkinghorne 1986.
6. This is so even if the fact is that God does not exist.
7. See any elementary text on quantum mechanics, e.g. Matthews 1968.
8. There is a parallel here with technological use of science.
9. For a discussion of the role of the sociologist see Bilton et al 1987 p604ff. For a discussion of insider and outsider views of systems, see Kraft 1979 p36.
10. For a discussion of action research in an educational context, see Nixon 1981. Variations are described by Oja and Smulyan 1989.
11. For a discussion of the place of questions in the journey towards knowledge see Gadamer 1975 p325-41.
12. This has been done through preaching and writing as well as personal interaction and putting insights into practice. See 3.2.1.

1.4 The questions

The deciding of the question is the way to knowledge.

Gadamer 1975, p328

The framing of questions is one of the most important parts of any research. It implies an initial admittance of ignorance necessary to learning, but also reflects the commitments and passions that determine the direction of study. This, as the discussion in 1.3, suggests that the initial questions may not be the right ones, so that questions should develop as part of the research process. The raising of interesting questions is then a sign of the fruitfulness of the research.

In keeping with the principles developed in 1.3, this section will seek to make personal as well as practical considerations explicit as it traces the development of the questions underlying the present study.

The research began with a proposal for study in the comparative theology of Christianity and Islam. This was not explicitly related to the missionary context, but the intention had arisen within that context. It was part of the larger question of Christian response and mission to the part of the world that does not accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and in particular to the Muslims in it. It arose in the context of a partial answer to that question in a particular situation.

The partial answer was given largely in terms of the incarnation, seeking to follow the pattern of Jesus in His cross-cultural mission from heaven to first century Palestine (see E in 3.2.2). That mission included identification and loving service, teaching about the nature of God, calling to repentance and faith, dying and rising again. As the ministry proceeded, it became clear that one of the key points at issue concerned the nature of God.

Jesus' teaching was largely directed towards those who believed in One God, but whose understanding of Him was deficient. It was not that they were unable to cope with the concept of trinity - that was a later problem - but that their thinking about God was different from

that of Jesus. In the synoptic gospels in particular, we see Jesus illuminating the character of God and His relationships with human beings. Jesus' own nature is indicated more by direct encounter than by conceptual teaching.

Similarly, Muslims believe in One God and are usually eager to obey His commands, but they have different conceptions of Him than those taught in the gospels. Many Christians seek to respond to them by following the pattern of Jesus' life and service, but when it comes to the nature of God, discussion tends to focus on debate about trinity and christology.

The pattern of the gospels would suggest that such debate is premature. Ideas of trinity, atonement and the divinity of Christ are unlikely to be understood if there is no agreement about the nature of God. Indeed, the debaters are likely to find themselves at cross purposes, since use of the word "God" by both parties may hinder understanding of its different meanings in the two systems. As C.J. Adams notes in his aptly titled 'Islam and Christianity: the opposition of similarities' (1984):

When one is perfectly familiar with a religious symbol from one's own tradition and personal experience, and when one finds this symbol in another tradition, more rather than less effort will be required to penetrate behind the face of the symbol to grasp what it means to the other. p289

It was such considerations that led to the questions:

WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS BELIEVE ABOUT GOD?

WHAT DO MUSLIMS BELIEVE ABOUT GOD?

WHERE ARE THESE BELIEFS THE SAME, AND WHERE DIFFERENT?

The motivation included both a desire for mutual understanding and a missionary concern for communication of Christian belief.

From an evangelical perspective, the place to turn to for authoritative answers about Christian belief is the Bible. The major Islamic authority is the Qur'an, and, since Bible and Qur'an are both Scriptures, it might be expected that comparison of the two should be possible. The question with which the research started was therefore:

HOW DO BIBLICAL AND QUR'ANIC CONCEPTS OF ONE GOD COMPARE?

From the Biblical side, it was decided to focus on the Old Testament, firstly because that is where ideas of the One God are established, and secondly because this avoids debates about trinity and christology. There is, it was thought, much common ground between Old Testament and Qur'an; but a comparative study might also indicate where this obscures important differences.

This defined the objects of study as the two Scriptures, but raised the further questions of where to look within them, of what kind of material might describe the concepts, and of how to understand that material.

As noted above, comparison of similar ideas can be difficult just because they are similar. Further, Jesus Himself seldom taught about God by direct assertion, and used action, story and parable more than theological lectures. These considerations suggested that the study of direct assertions about God might obscure rather than aid comparative study.

The next stage was to start looking for themes linked with statements about unity. It soon became evident that the ideas were so pervasive in both Qur'an and Bible that a much more restricted focus was needed. Further, the variety of places in which the ideas could be found in the Scriptures began to raise hermeneutic questions within both systems.

In particular, although themes may be similar, the Bible and the Qur'an present them in different contexts and use them in different ways. Further, because the Bible and the Qur'an are different sorts of books, they are interpreted in different ways. It therefore became evident that questions of what might be comparable as well as what might be practicable would have to be tackled in order to decide what to compare and how to compare it. These questions are explored in chapter two. The outcome was a decision to compare parallel stories, and to seek to read the Qur'an through a range of relevant commentators (see 3.2.1). It was already becoming clear that personal

and contextual considerations would predominate in the choice of reading methods.

There have been several comparative studies of Biblical and Qur'anic stories, most of which look at the prophets¹. The Adam stories, which have had little such attention², were taken as a starting point. Rather than looking for ideas about God, the stories themselves were compared.

They proved remarkably rich in illuminating both common ground and subtle differences between Bible and Qur'an, but focussed more on the nature of human beings than on God. At the same time, understanding of the need to acknowledge motivation and personal involvement was growing. Thus, while the study was assisting in the understanding of Muslim neighbours and Christian mission, it was also challenging my own thinking and providing material for sharing with other Christians.

In particular, the Adam stories include Eve, I am a woman working mainly amongst women, and the study coincided with debates about the ordination of women in the Church of England. I was asked to prepare some Biblical reflections on women's roles, and also to prepare a paper about Christian mission to Muslim women. This gave opportunity to investigate the ministry of other women and to present and discuss findings.

It was at this stage that it was decided to make interaction between reading and context a feature of the research. What was found in the Bible was to be used to critique ministry, especially within my own evangelical tradition. The intention was to monitor responses to feeding findings back into the system. It was decided to keep the Adam and Eve stories as a basis, but to look at them in the context of Genesis 1-11. This was for several reasons:

A. While exegetes have given most of their attention to Genesis 1-3, the introduction to the patriarchs and therefore to the history of Israel includes the whole of Genesis 1-11. Even Adam does not die

until chapter 5, and Eve's function as mother is not described until chapter 4.

B. The Genesis chapters have been the subject of much Biblical scholarship. This meant that I could use others' exegetical work, and focus on the comparative studies. At the same time, there has been little attempt at comparison of the Genesis 4-11 stories with parallel Qur'anic stories³, so that there was plenty of scope for original work.

C. These chapters represent an important but largely unexplored basis for mission. Although Carey (1792) traced the need for mission back to Adam's sin, most studies of the Biblical basis for mission before 1960 focussed on the New Testament. The Old Testament was used mainly to establish universal intent, with Ruth, Jonah, Psalms and parts of Isaiah being called as witnesses (Rowley 1939). Some writers (Zwemer 1943, Smith 1884) went back to the Abrahamic covenant, but few ventured beyond Genesis 12.

Blauw (1962), looking at the whole sweep of Scripture as a basis for mission, uses Genesis 1-11 as his "point of departure" (p17). He sees these chapters as "a key to the understanding of the Old Testament and even, for those who recognise the unity of the Bible, of the whole Bible" (p18). He points out their importance in describing the relationship between God, the world and the nations as the background to the call of Abraham and therefore to the history of Israel. However, he gives them only four pages in his book.

Following Blauw, several writers have used Genesis 1-11 in studies of mission. Particular focusses are the nature of God and His actions (Senior and StuhlmueLLer 1983), His universal intent (Verkyl 1978, Goerner 1979) and the pattern of fall and covenant (Sundkler 1965). The most detailed treatment is that of Hedlund (1985, p5-17). He focusses on the unity of humanity in creation and fall. The inclusiveness of the table of nations and the shared tragedy of Babel are then the context for the call of Abraham. He also suggests God's coming of 3v8 as the first mission (see D of 3.7.1), but does not discuss the implications of this for our mission.⁴

These chapters are used, then, as foundations for Biblical understandings of mission, but all the above mentioned works look at them only briefly in the context of wider concerns. It was decided that there was room, and perhaps even need, for a more detailed study in a missiological context.

The question was then expressed in terms of a provisional thesis title:
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN WOMEN RESPONDING TO MUSLIM WOMEN IN
THE INNER CITY: A CRITIQUE BASED ON A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THE ONE GOD IN GENESIS 1-11 AND PARALLEL QUR'ANIC
PASSAGES

The attempt to include ministries of women elsewhere ran into difficulties of time-scale, control and confidentiality; and at the same time the study was increasingly interacting with my life and ministry in Elswick, so that a fourth reason for studying these particular passages became evident:

D. The Christian working in a mixed inner city community has to deal with questions about people, groups, evil and suffering. It is just such questions that are the concern of Genesis 1-11.

This led to two further changes in emphasis. Firstly, the main ministry to be critiqued became my own and that of the local church. Secondly, the actual study of the texts shifted its focus from the nature of the One God to that of human beings, and to our identity as people of different families, experiences, religions and ethnic groups.

The initial intention of studying the Bible to find the answer to a specific question had turned into a mandate to respond to it as it was studied in a particular context. The principle of the obedience of the theologian became explicit, and the title became:

WHO ARE WE? A RESPONSE TO GENESIS 1-11 IN THE LIGHT OF
PARALLEL QUR'ANIC STORIES BY A JEWISH EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIAN WOMAN MINISTERING AMONGST MUSLIMS IN THE INNER
CITY.

This is the study in chapter 3. In place of the general question with which the research began is a specific study in a specific situation, that has been constrained to look at the texts in particular ways arising from those specifics (see chapter 2). However, reflection on the specifics provoked general questions about a hermeneutic appropriate in the contexts of mission to people of a different culture and the sacred book of another faith. In that such questions are seldom asked, especially in Islamic contexts and by evangelicals⁵, the very raising of them is an important result of the research.

The study can be seen as an answer to general questions with respect to a particular situation. From it, generalised answers can be suggested that can be tested by application in other particular places. The final title reflects the general question of reading in context as well as the specific study within which the question is explored.

Returning to the parallel with the physical sciences, the study can be seen as an experiment which has been developed to investigate a particular system. It started with a preliminary hypothesis (that a comparative understanding of concepts of the one God would illuminate Christian response to Muslims) which determined the initial direction of investigation, but its intention was discovery rather than confirmation.

The specific experiment then yielded results from which more generalised questions and hypotheses could be abstracted. That is, a model for reading the Bible in an inter-faith missionary context has been developed by means of doing some reading in a particular context. The model has then been abstracted and is offered for application and testing in other particular contexts.

Notes on 1.4

1. Masson 1958 offers a brief comparison of all the prophetic stories. Breiner 1985 and Parks 1987 are two of several studies on Abraham. Abdel Haleem 1990, Mir 1986, Rendsburg 1988 and Waldmann 1986 consider Joseph.
2. Nolin 1964 is a translation of a consideration of the Adam story by Kamil Hussain. Woodberry 1989b includes reflection on the comparative seriousness of sin. The other material on Adam in the bibliography gives little comparison with the Genesis story.
3. Exceptions are Masson 1958 and Ahmed Khan 1862.
4. In the context of relationships with people of other faiths, Cracknell (1986) devotes 2 pages (44-6) to the importance of the thôl^edhôth formulae and the Table of Nations in understanding biblical ideas of the relatedness of humanity and the position of Israel relative to the nations.
5. Even Sugirtharajah (1991a) includes only two papers from Islamic contexts. One (Amjad-Ali) deals with women's issues and has negligible engagement with the Qur'an. The other (Engineer) is by a Muslim and does not consider Biblical hermeneutics.

2. Setting up the Study

Setting up the study has involved decisions about what to study, how to study it and how to relate the different things studied. This chapter maps out the questions and preliminary answers to them. It is not prescriptive or critical¹, but descriptive of what has been done and why. The story of how the study has developed is structured to expound the model that will be abstracted in chapter 4.

In harmony with the methodology, the analysis post-dates the study: that is, methods and questions were developed as the study progressed rather than decided upon beforehand, and the process was then reflected upon. The study was then checked and sharpened in the light of the reflection, and it is the revised study that is presented in chapter 3.

The objects of study are the Bible, the Qur'an and the community, and the focus the faithful reading of the Bible in the particular context. The chapter therefore begins with starting points in handling the Bible, and goes on to ask why and how the Qur'an is to be read. The attempt to read the two Books together then raises questions of what might be comparable in both content and reading methods, and the recognition that the reading is ^{to} be done in context raises questions of how the community is to be understood and observed. A map for reading Bible, Qur'an and community together is then proposed.

2.1 The Bible

Ways of reading the Bible depend not only on the individual, but also on the community within which (s)he functions. They are largely a matter of choice: the reader can choose whether to focus on the historical or the literary, on the implications for herself or for others, on her critique of the Bible or on its critique of her. Such choices are made on the basis of who she is, what she believes and the context in which she lives.

In setting up the study, the methodological considerations of 1.3 require a first stage of making these bases as explicit as possible.

This section states them as they are perceived to be relevant to the research.

2.1.1 The reader.

A Christian disciple.

This means that my first loyalty is to God in Christ, and that I am bound to obey whatever I find that He wants. My reading cannot be a merely academic exercise, but must be part of discipleship.

A woman.

This means not only that I experience my own culture and faith from a woman's perspective, but also that I relate almost exclusively to women and children within the local Islamic cultures. I approach the Bible aware that it has almost exclusively been written and interpreted by men. I come to Genesis aware of its centrality in recent discussions of gender roles, and hoping to find affirmation for women.

A Jew.

I am of mixed race, my mother having been an English Gentile and my father a Czech Jew. The appreciation of my Jewish background that has grown during the course of the study has led to my consciously reading the Bible as a Jewish Christian. This does not mean reading from within Judaism: I shall take Jewish commentary into account, but interpret the text from within my faith in Jesus as Messiah.

For the purposes of this study, the strongest effect of the Jewish background has been ^{through} the re-owning of the experience of my family during and following the second world war (see 3.5.6).

A scientist and a teacher.

My academic background has been in physics (see Glaser 1979) and education, and my professional experience before moving to Elswick in physics teaching in a variety of cultural situations². The implications of this for methodology have been explored in 1.3.

A missionary.

I believe that God has called me to minister to people of a different

culture, and particularly to Muslims. I therefore focus on the peoples' needs - spiritual as well as physical, mental and social. In particular, the call is to meet the need to hear God's call in Christ. This means that it is not only my own ministry that matters, but also that of other Christian people. Obedience to God's call to me includes encouraging others to obey God's call to them.

2.1.2 Beliefs.

The Christian tradition to which I belong is that of evangelicalism. Its characteristic beliefs are summarised in the sample basis of faith in Appendix I. For this study, two beliefs are particularly relevant:

The belief in the universal need and offer of salvation through Christ, and in His uniqueness as Saviour. I find this belief constantly challenged from within as well as from outside Christian circles, but it is still the framework within which I work, and to which I have hitherto always returned after engaging with the challenges³.

The belief in the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. This means that, while it is inevitably determined by the person that I am, my reading should be primarily determined by what the Bible is. Three points should be made here:

First, acceptance of the Bible as authoritative means that I seek to see it as my judge rather than myself as its judge. This is not just personal: I would put any human authority under that of Scripture. Thus, while they have their places, I consider both reason and tradition, whether of church or of academia, as secondary: no agenda from self, culture or community should be given conscious priority over the Bible⁴.

Second, the idea of the Bible as the Word of God is very different from the idea of the Qur'an as the Word of God: similarity of language can mask differences of concept⁵ (see 2.3-4).

Third, the consequence of these beliefs: "whatever Scripture, truly interpreted, is found to teach, we are bound to believe and obey". This raises the hermeneutic question: the phrase "truly interpreted" is the key to both belief and obedience. The basis

of faith makes no stipulation about hermeneutics, although it does state beliefs that are believed to result from true interpretation, and in the context of which interpretation is carried out.

2.1.3 Context

The place in which I live, my neighbours, and the events that happen here all demand responses. They therefore set my agenda and raise questions for the text. The people I meet also function as the recipients of and debaters about the answers I hear it offering.

I read as a member of several communities :

The Elswick community described in 3.2.2.

This brings the urban questions about crime and punishment, rubbish and vandalism, family breakdown and the bringing up of children, racism and fear . . .

The small inner city church of St Paul's.

This brings questions of Christian survival and response, and of how the church can minister to people both within and without it, in the context of common deprivation.

The Asian Project team.

This brings specific questions of understanding of and response to the local Asian community.

The wider church, particularly evangelicals involved in mission amongst people of other faiths in the UK.

This brings questions of theology of religions. It also raises the problems of ignorance and fear within churches and of community responses to different communities.

The theology department in Durham University.

This raises the questions of western academic approaches to both Scriptures. While I can choose to use Muslim rather than western commentary on the Qur'an, my own context means that I must listen to western academic commentary on the Bible. This does not mean that I am limited to such an approach, but that the history of western interpretation is part of the context within which I work.

2.1.4 How shall I read?

The methodology of 1.3 requires recognition of the difference between subject and object, reader and text, and of interactions between them. This implies awareness of the two "horizons" of the ancient world in which the text was written and the present situation in which the reader lives. Thus, in the light of the commitments and passions of the reader, the text is to be informed by historical critical work which illuminates its origins.

Because the Bible is read as a sacred text, the attempt to understand it as object is only a beginning. It is then handled as a source of belief and action; that is, it is to be treated as true and authoritative. This raises questions of what is meant by truth and authority.

There is not space here for a discussion of these questions, but for a brief statement of my own answers to them. In the context of scientific methodology, it makes sense to speak of truth as correspondence to facts or to reality. This I take to be basic but not exhaustive: truth may be more than this, but is not less⁶ Therefore I expect a correspondence between the Genesis text and the world it describes. The nature of the correspondence is to be determined by a study of the text⁷.

In saying that it is authoritative, I mean that it corresponds not only to the world in which it was written but also to the world as it has been since. In particular, it corresponds to the time and place in which I live. Further, as the Word of God it has implications for every person in their own time and place, which those persons have an obligation to heed.

There are several implications here:

First, that the human aspects of the production of the text were providentially ordered and do not distort the intended meaning (see Packer 1981 p100-1). Any distortion is in interpretation.

Second, that understandings should be checked against other parts of the Bible that are also true and authoritative.

Third, that there is continuity between ancient scripture and present reality.

There are obvious discontinuities of history, geography and world view between Elswick and the ancient Near East, and these are seldom difficult to discern. Discerning the continuities is the key to the interactive and self-critical programme that has been proposed. It is experienced as recognition of aspects of the present in the ancient text. It is thus that God can be encountered speaking here and now.

However, recognising the present as in some ways continuous with the past can lead to ignoring important differences and to interpreting texts in ways that conflict with their origins (see Thiselton 1991 p412). Answers to current questions and perceptions of God speaking need therefore to be assessed against historical critical findings, other parts of the Bible and past Christian interpretations.

The whole process has been described as a hermeneutic spiral⁹, in which a dialogue is set up between the present situation and the Bible. The reader approaches the text from his or her particular perspective, and then returns to view the historical situation on the basis of what is discovered in the text. The process is then repeated to give a (hopefully) upward spiral of understanding of both Scripture and situation.

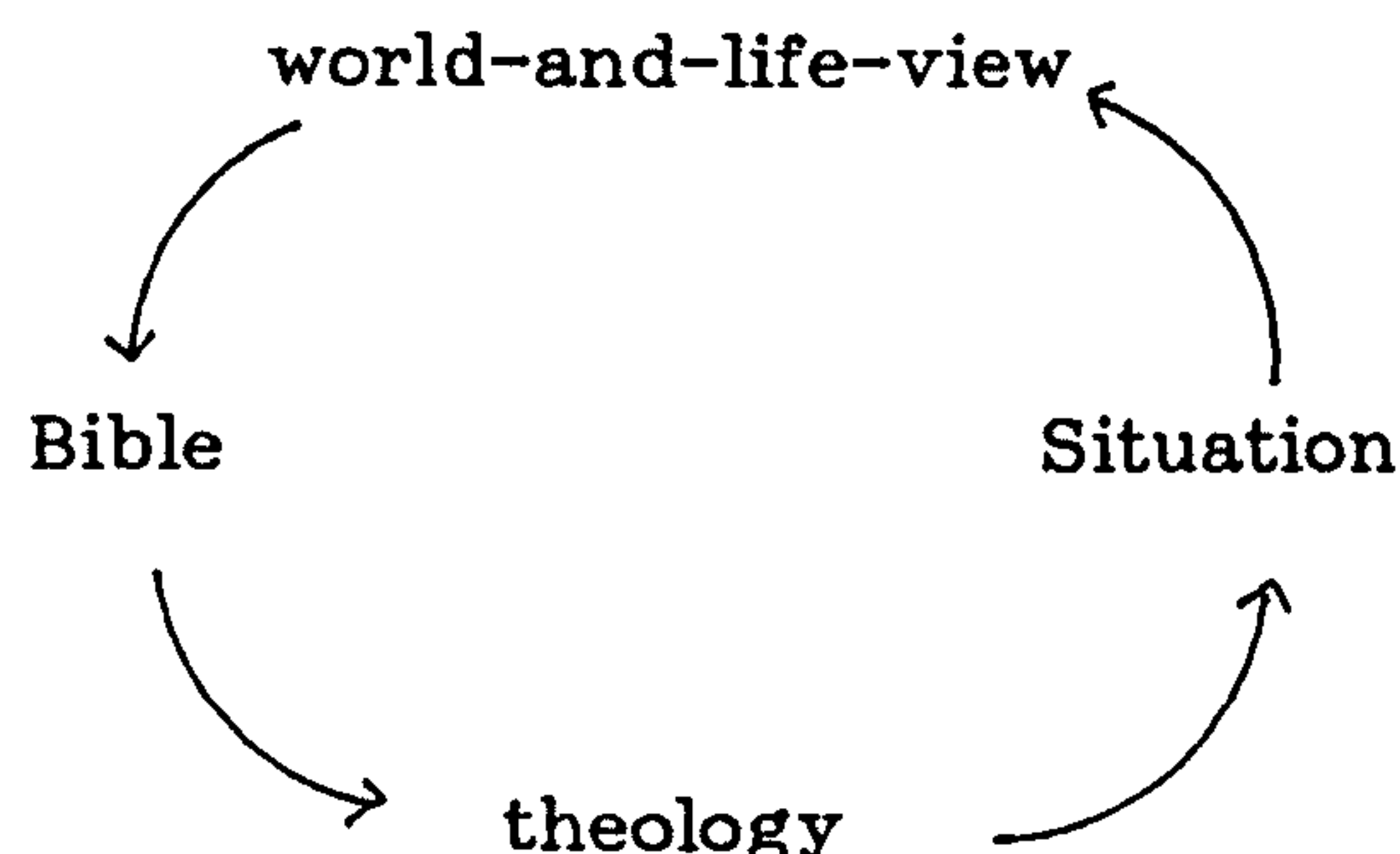


Fig 1

(after Padilla 1981a p75)

Such a model is characteristic of liberation approaches to theology, in which action as well as reflection is part of the theologising. This then becomes parallel with the interactive approach proposed in 1.3.

A related model is that of Schneiders (1991). She describes the world "behind" the text that produces it, the world "of" the text that exists in its language and meanings, and the world "before" the text into which the present reader is invited. She summarises:

The distancing of the text from the reader that both protects the reader against the limitations of the text and the text from loss of identity by non-dialectic assimilation to the world of the reader has, as its ultimate goal, not the alienation of the text from the reader but a second, post-critical naïveté. Unless the text, once criticised, can again become transparent, the transformative encounter between reader and subject matter cannot take place.

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The alternatives envisaged are

1. Assimilation of the text into the world of the reader; which loses understanding of the text in its own context.
2. Historical critical treatment of the text; which loses appropriation of the text in the world of the reader.
3. A dialectic fusion between the worlds of text and of reader.

Since both the nature of the text and the discipleship of the reader are important, alternatives 1 and 2 are, by themselves, unsatisfactory. Therefore alternative 3 is proposed. The question arises as to whether there are other possibilities.

In the missionary context, where a third horizon is to be introduced (see 2.2), the fusion model may not be appropriate. A model that lends itself to extension into the comparative study (see 2.4.2 and 2.6) is that of conversation. Tate (1991 pxx) proposes:

Meaning results from a conversation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, a conversation informed by the world of the author.

This suggests a two-way interaction which keeps the worlds distinct rather than seeking to fuse them. It results not in a synthesis but in a recognition of similarities between two horizons that remain separate. Of course, a measure of fusion may occur as the reader becomes absorbed into the story, but the conversation model suggests

a constant process of distancing which reminds him or her of the differences between the worlds. The result of the conversation is likely to be the discernment of the similarities and differences between them.

The process is similar to that of **analogical reasoning**, where system A can be discussed through an argument in system B, where A and B have a common area as in Fig 2.

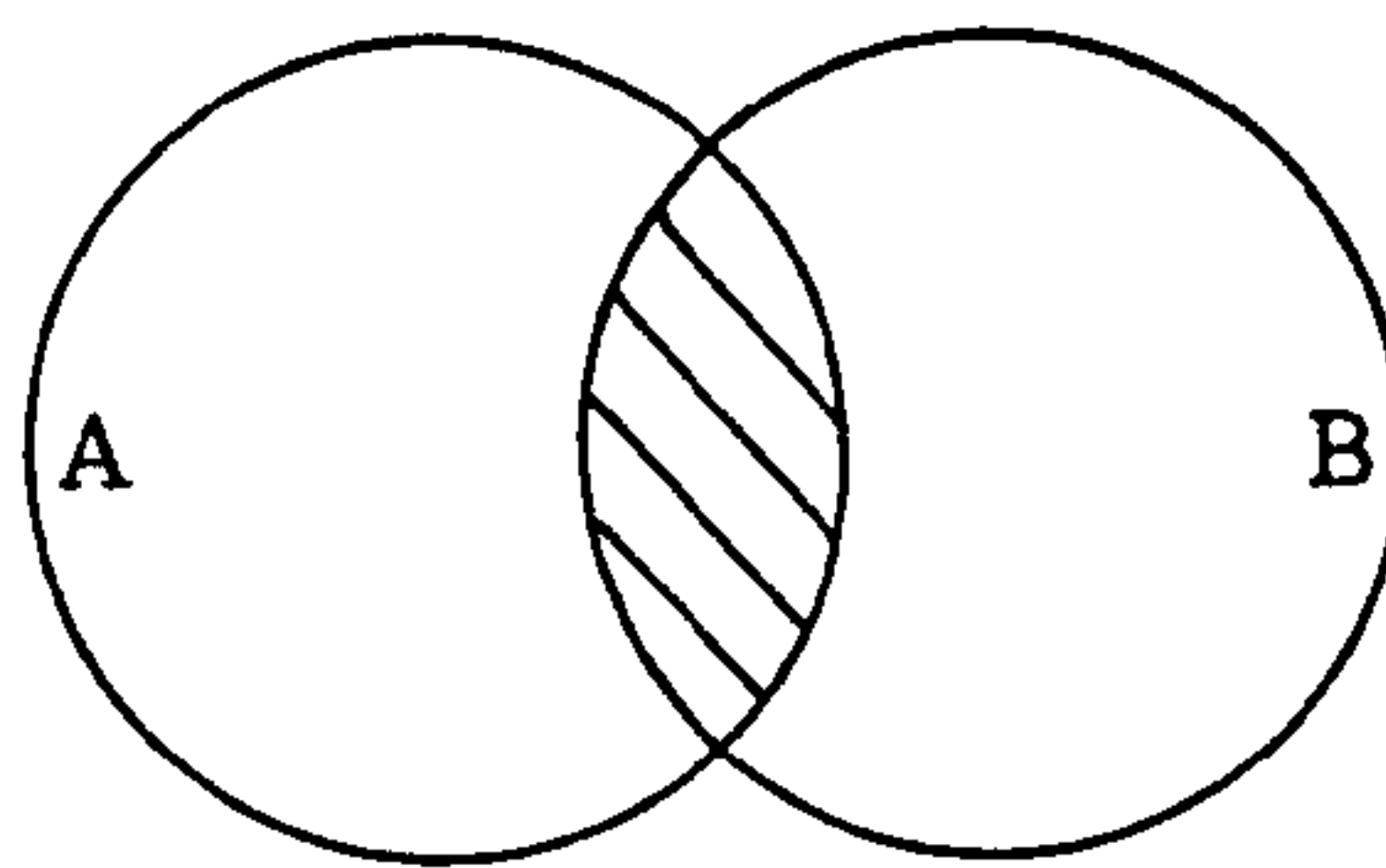


Fig 2

Suppose that A represents the present situation and B the text. The reading of text in context provokes recognition of some factor in the shaded area $A \cap B$, which is common to both systems. Understanding of the text might then be developed by considering this factor within the situation, that is, staying within circle A. Any conclusion reached should then be tested by a return to the text (B), to ensure that it lies within $A \cap B$ and is therefore a valid interpretation of the text.

Analogical reasoning models are common to several disciplines relevant to the present study. In Islam, *qiyās* or analogical reasoning is the recognised means of applying Qur'an and *ḥadīth* to contemporary problems (Doi 1984 p70-8). In Talmudic reasoning, arguments by comparison and differentiation are common (Jacobs 1984, p14 and chapter 3). In science, it is possible to argue that all mathematical representations of physical systems are analogical (Glaser 1982b).

In the current model, the process of conversation will result in the recognition of that which is continuous between the world of the text and that of the reader. As conversation continues, continuities and discontinuities will be identified and clarified, thus setting up the **analogical understanding** of text and context represented by Fig.2. In 2.4, this model will be extended to the comparison of Bible and Qur'an.

2.1.5 Reading Genesis

Rogerson (1991), in his guide to Genesis 1-11, points out that approaches have changed as concerns have changed. After exploring a variety of models, he proposes four decisions to be taken in choosing an approach:

Do we look at sources or the final form of the material?

Do we interpret the Bible as a whole or set some trends against others?

How do we seek the intentions and motives of the text? From the text itself, from its setting in history, or from the wider context?

Where does it get its authority?

In the end, this is a matter of choice within a context (p45). The choice also depends on motivation and attitudes to the Bible.

The passions and commitments described above provoke the following choices:

To look at the final form of the material, since this is what the evangelical community recognises as authoritative.

To interpret the Bible as a whole, since the evangelical community sees the whole Bible as the self-consistent Word of God.

To seek the intentions of the text primarily from the text itself, although checking consistency of interpretations with its historical and canonical setting.

To see the authority of the text as derived from the authority of God. It is God Himself who is the authority, and it is only as His word that the text is authoritative.

In that the context is one of deprivation and the reader is a woman reading amongst women, there will be common concerns with some of the liberation and feminist agendas. These will be taken into account, but will not be used as primary hermeneutical keys (see also 2.1.2).

Given this framework, how shall I actually handle the texts? The major constraint here has been the missionary context, and in particular the concern to read them alongside the Qur'an. This latter

has limited and directed the reading as much as have all the considerations above.

Notes on 2.1

1. Critique of and pointers from the study can be found in chapter 4.
2. Including girls schools in Malaysia and the Republic of the Maldives, an American school in London and several British schools.
3. Hick and Knitter (1987), D'Costa (1990) and Clarke and Winter (1991) offer a spectrum of approaches to other faiths. For a discussion in the Anglican context, see the Anglican Consultative Council's Towards a Theology of Inter-Faith Dialogue, second edition 1986. Lamb 1984 and Wright 1984 debate the first edition of the report.
4. Unconscious priority is inevitable; but in that it is unconscious I have to rely on others to correct it.
5. See also Glaser 1982a, Nasr 1975 chapter 2.
6. For further reference to the truth question, see chapter 4 and Popper 1972, chapter 10.
7. For example, see the discussion on different approaches to relating our Genesis texts to modern science explored in 2.2.2.
8. See for example Thiselton 1992 p221 on Schleiermacher, Gadamer 1975 p235ff and Padilla 1981a.

2.2 Reading in missionary perspective

2.2.1 How do Muslims read the Bible?

If the missionary objective is that Muslims should receive the witness of the Bible, this is an important question. Because Islam developed in an environment affected by Judaism and Christianity, and because the Qur'an refers extensively to the Bible, most Muslim people have firm ideas about both Bible and Christianity before they ever meet Christians.

Despite Qur'anic affirmations of previous Scriptures (e.g. 5:47-50), Islamic studies of the Bible are even more difficult to find than are Christian studies of the Qur'an. This may seem strange, since the Qur'an assumes much of the Biblical narrative and can be difficult to understand without it. However, Rippin (1993) points out that the inclusion of Biblical and Rabbinic material in early Islamic traditions made the actual study of the Bible seem unnecessary. The *tafsīr* (commentaries) and stories of prophets supply all the narrative detail needed to make sense of Qur'anic allusions so that in practice the Qur'an is detached from its Biblical roots.

From early times, the main Muslim use of the Bible has been polemic. Because the Qur'an suggests that Muhammad was foretold in the Bible (7:157 and 61:6), Muslims have searched the Bible for such prophecy. Because the Qur'an contains verses that can be interpreted as teaching the corruption of the Bible (e.g. 4:46, 5:14&16), Muslims have sought inconsistencies, immoralities and contradictions with the Qur'an in the Bible¹.

There are but few exceptions. A notable one deals with our Genesis chapters. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible (1862) is a serious introduction to the Old Testament and detailed commentary on Genesis 1-11 in the light of then contemporary western criticism. It treats the Bible as consonant with Islam, and argues for its reliability over against the critics. Its argument with Christians is not about reliability but about interpretation.

Among our chosen commentators, Maududi and Yusuf Ali often refer to the Bible. This is sometimes to fill gaps in the Qur'anic narratives, but more often to criticise. The most popular current versions of the ancient arguments are found in the writings and videos of Ahmed Deedat² that are widely circulated in Elswick as in other Muslim communities in the U.K..

More relevant to our current study are various accounts of the stories of prophets that include comparative discussion. They follow the tradition of criticism of the Biblical versions, seeing them as slurs on the characters of the prophets. Muhajir 1965 is a notable example. His publisher summarises his approach in the notes on the dust cover³:

It is simply shocking to see that the Bible attributes deceit and lies to Abraham, cheating and treachery to Isaac and Jacob, adultery to David, incest to Lot . . . and at the same time calls all of them men after God's own heart, pointing unceasingly perhaps to the defect in God Himself for approving nefarious and heinous practices.

In contrast:

The Qur'anic concept of God in its sublime purity and majesty is so radically different from the ridiculous and horribly unclean conception given by the Bible that one having no bias is constrained to admit that Muhammad could possibly have had no inspiration from the Bible or the Jews and Christians of his time, as he had no access to the Bible.

Thus differences in Qur'anic and Biblical approaches to prophets are seen as pointing to both the superiority of the Qur'an and its divine origin.

Such Muslim writers see Christianity in general and the Bible in particular as contrary to Islam. From their point of view, the Christian is a representative of a competing system. However, they are likely to insist that they are not attacking us or our prophets. Returning to Muhajir's book, M. Hamidullah writes in his foreword (piii):

The Judaeo-Christians will certainly benefit from a perusal of this book which, far from being a polemic against them, is an attempt to reglorify the names so dear to them. For every Muslim believes in the Prophets of yore *as he believes in Muhammed* (Sallal-lahu-calaihi-wa-sallam). (My italics)

This is the heart of the matter. The Muslim sees the prophets as in

the pattern of Muhammad, and, as we shall see, the Qur'an presents their stories in that pattern. It is therefore to be expected that Muslims will read the Bible through the Qur'an (see Rippin 1993) and its stories through the story of Muhammad.

Locally, attitudes vary. Whilst some repeat the Deedat arguments at every opportunity, others are interested in the Bible, and especially in its accounts of prophets with whom they are familiar. It is evident, however, that all begin by hearing the stories from within their own understanding of prophecy.

2.2.2 Reading in the context of an alternative system

The interpretation of Scripture involves allowing it to speak into the time and place in which it is read. In a missionary situation, the texts are to speak not only to the "us" of the interpretative community, but also to the "them" of another community. "They" will inevitably hear and interpret them through their own thinking.

I would like to suggest that every situation is in fact a missionary situation. There is never a time and place when the Bible is read in a purely Christian environment: there is always another system that offers an alternative to the faith. The problem is that, when the readers have developed inside that system, they may not recognise it.

For example, Newbiggin (1986 and elsewhere) has called the U.K. churches at the end of the twentieth century to recognise the competition of secularism. That is not to say that everything in contemporary culture should be rejected, but that its effects should be recognised. In the interpretation of the Bible, the call is not necessarily to jettison the methods that have sprung from enlightenment thinking, but to recognise that we have read through culture-tinted glasses. Even within western culture the third horizon of the alternative system arises.

In considering how this affects Bible reading, it will simplify matters to begin from an example of an encounter within western culture.

Relevant to our study and to my particular background is western science as an alternative to the Genesis account of beginnings.

A twentieth century English person reading Genesis 1-3 is likely to see it as a naive account in direct opposition to "science". The reader has various options:

- * To use Genesis 1-3 to refute science. The classic example here is Morris and Whitcombe 1961, which argues that geological evidence underpinning evolutionary theory results from the flood.

- * To use science to refute Genesis. This is not a serious option for the Christian who accepts Genesis as canonical⁴.

- * To use science to re-interpret Genesis. The method of a number of Christian scientists has been to put scientific theory alongside Genesis and to note similarities. For example, Berry 1975, puts a geological timetable alongside Genesis 1 and presents evidence for human beginnings in a single pair.

The problem with all three approaches is that they assume that Genesis and science deal with similar questions and uses similar categories. This is not necessarily so. Perhaps more satisfactory is a fourth approach, which seeks to listen to both Genesis and science in their own terms:

- * To go back to Genesis with the questions raised by science, and to ask whether it is in fact in competition with science.

This requires the twentieth century westerner to recognise that Genesis was written by someone from a different time who asked different questions and communicated in different ways⁵. Such an approach is common amongst theologians. It is also the approach of a number of scientists who have come to see the Bible and science as complementary ways of seeking truth. This may then turn them back to looking at the basis of science, and to the recognition that much of it inspired by the study of the Bible⁶. Ramachandra (1990) takes this further by using Genesis to critique science and technology.

Thus this fourth approach not only allows science to be itself and Genesis to be itself⁷, but also sets up a dialogue between the two systems. It helps the Christian community to re-assess its

understanding of its scriptures and to perceive the nature of its mission to "science".

These approaches can be paralleled in Christian responses to other faiths. It is possible to use the Bible to refute their systems, to use their systems to refute the Bible, or to use their systems as a basis for re-interpreting the Bible. Any of these options is likely to assume that both systems ask similar questions and speak in similar categories. The fourth, and, I suggest, preferable option is to seek to understand both systems in their own terms, so that dialogue can be set up, understanding of the Bible developed, and the imperatives of Christian mission more clearly discerned.

The process is relatively straightforward with science, which has arguably grown out of the Biblical system and can therefore be seen as complementary to or even part of it⁸. It may be more difficult where the alternative system has quite different roots.

In particular, the scientific enterprise is a human activity, and the knowledge it produces is of and from the natural order as well as about the natural order: the question is whether this negates the supernatural, and, if it does not, there is no intrinsic contradiction in seeing the two as complementary⁹.

Many other alternative systems would see themselves as relating to the supernatural as well as to the natural, and therefore as speaking about the same things as does the Bible. This means that they may be in competition with the Bible and can be seen as complementary to it to only a limited extent. However, the same principles apply: the person reading the Bible from within the alternative system is likely to start by reading it as (s)he reads his/her own Scripture; and the alternatives for the Christian are refutation of the other, re-interpretation of the Bible, or dialogue which challenges both Biblical understanding and the alternative system.

An example relating to our Genesis texts is given in M. Pongudom's (1991) 'Creation of Man: Theological reflections based on North Thai

folktales'. This presents stories from three different traditions, all of which have facets in common with Genesis. Unlike the twentieth century English person whose first reading would see Genesis as different and therefore probably wrong, the North Thai person might see Genesis as similar to and therefore of the same kind as their own stories. The similarities can be a helpful starting point for dialogue and for communication of other aspects of Biblical teaching, and it is important that the Christian relating to the North Thai people learns to appreciate their stories.

Similarly, Christians relating to other religious groups need to appreciate their stories and their Scriptures. Sugirtharajah (1991b) suggests that this is also necessary for the right interpretation of the Bible in such contexts:

In the present hermeneutical tasks, Christian interpreters cannot ignore the religious texts of other communities. . . . A proper hermeneutics should . . . look for what these religious texts are trying to convey, and understand them on their own terms rather than pre-judge them

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However, both Pongudom and Sugirtharajah go beyond the call to understand the other and to read the Bible in its context, and imply (although they do not clearly state it) that all religious texts have similar standings. Sugirtharajah (1991b p361 and 440, 1993 p59) repeatedly voices doubts about giving the Bible priority, and implies that it is wrong to use it as a "yardstick". Although denying that his approach minimizes truth claims (1991a p442), he implies that such use of the Bible is a pre-judging of the other, and notes the common concerns of sacred texts:

All scriptures seek to tell in their own way the story of how they understand the mercies of God and the mysteries of life.

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While this statement is true in itself, however, it says nothing about the relative standings of the Scriptures, since it deals only with their human intents. If religion has to do with things outside the natural order, then Scriptures must raise the question of revelation.

In the case of the Thai tales, and of Sugirtharajah's Hindu context, the non-Biblical system itself allows for plurality. There are at least three different Thai tales of creation: there can be one more in the

Bible. There are numerous alternatives within the Hindu Scriptures: there can be one more in the Bible. Thus the situations within which the comparisons arise make it possible to put the Scriptures on an equal footing. If they are treated as competing rather than complementary, this will be in response to the Bible and not to the other Scripture, and any Christian claim to priority may be seen as arrogant, hostile and superior¹⁰.

The Islamic context is quite different, since the Islamic Scripture itself claims priority. From a Muslim point of view, the Qur'an cannot be considered as one of many equally valid Scriptures. Handling it as an equal and complementary text to any other Scripture is therefore likely to be at least as offensive to many Muslims as is saying that the Qur'an is "wrong", since to relativise it is to imply at least a measure of human authorship. Any handling of the Qur'an must recognise the Islamic claims for it, even if it overtly disagrees with them.

Islam does allow for other Scriptures, but insofar as they are in conflict with the Qur'an sees them as distorted. The Bible has a special position here but, as already noted, most Muslims have an ambiguous attitude to it. Their yard-stick is the Qur'an - that which agrees with it is part of the original books, and that which disagrees is distortion. Competition is therefore inevitable, whatever the Christian might wish.

While, then, it is desirable to follow Sugirtharajah's exhortation to listen to both Scriptures "on their own terms", this is not likely to lead to a view of them as complementary¹¹. They might be seen as such if both were viewed through Christian eyes, or if both were viewed through Muslim eyes, but not if the Bible is seen from a Christian point of view and the Qur'an from a Muslim point of view. The Christian's choice of a dialogical rather than a confrontational approach to comparing the texts does not change this.

Notes on 2.2

1. Lazarus-Yafeh's (1992) survey of medieval Islamic uses of the Bible explores arguments against the Bible in chapter 2 and exegesis to prove predictions of Muhammad and Islam in chapter 4. Cate (1977) chapter 2 notes some more positive early attitudes to the Bible.
2. A series of booklets available from the Islamic Propagation Centre, Birmingham, includes such titles as 50,000 Errors in the Bible?, Is the Bible God's Word?, What the Bible says about Muhammed and Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?. For an account of one debate from a Christian point of view, see McDowell and Gilchrist 1983.
3. Confrontational and offensive attitudes are not only on one side. Copleston (1982) says of some of the Qur'anic treatment of the all-determining nature of God: "No one whose moral sense has not been doped by Satan could possibly believe in such a God as the preceding Suras reveal." (p423).
4. This is an option for the Muslim who wishes to challenge Christianity. The most widely circulated example is probably the works of Bucaille (1976 and 1983), which use a mixture of western critical scholarship and a literal handling of Biblical texts to refute the Bible. They then present the Qur'an as scientific, and conclude that Islam is the true faith.
5. The possibility of using the early chapters of Genesis in a way not consistent with their intent was noted as far back as Augustine (Confessions XII, 35): "Behold, how foolish it is, in so great an abundance of the truest opinions, which can be extracted from these words, rashly to affirm which of them Moses particularly meant, and with pernicious contentions to offend charity itself, on account of which he hath spoken all things whose words we endeavour to explain!"
6. There is an oft-quoted statement of F. Bacon, Advancement of Learning, 1605: "Let no man uppon a weake conceit of sobrietie, or an ill applyed moderation think or maintaine, that a man can search too farre, or bee too well studied in the Booke of Gods word or in the Booke of Gods works; Divinities or Philosophie".
7. A key question here, and for this thesis, is what it might mean to "let Genesis be itself".
8. See for example Hooykaas 1972. For a range of historical interpretations, see Russell 1973.
9. See for example the writings of Polkinghorne (1986 and 1991), a theoretical physicist and Anglican priest.
10. This does not mean that such a Christian claim is wrong, but that it is likely to be perceived as wrong by the person from the other faith. I would want to say that the Christian has not only the right but also the duty to use the Bible as a yard-stick: many Christians in Hindu contexts would agree (e.g. Gnanakan 1988).
11. Even Sugirtharajah includes no readings of the Bible in the context of the Qur'an in his section on multi-faith hermeneutics. There is only an example of an Islamic liberation hermeneutic.

2.3 The Qur'an

2.3.1 Christians and the Qur'an?

There is a long history of Christian readings of the Qur'an. Cate (1977) summarises both early polemic and more recent academic approaches. Until the nineteenth century, he concludes, most Christian writers saw the Qur'an as something to be refuted¹, the main need being to explain the existence of a book claiming to be revelation but coming after the New Testament. They therefore focussed on its claims and origins, and on seeking inconsistencies. Only a few, such as Timothy the Patriarch and Peter the Venerable, also made an attempt to understand it and even to use it in trying to persuade Muslims to accept Christianity.

The more recent writers considered by Cate² stand in the western academic tradition, aiming at understanding rather than refutation. However, in Cate's judgement, they all interpret the Qur'an from their own point of view rather than from that of Muslim people. Most focus on ancient Christian concerns about origins and on modern western concerns about dating, text and context.

An exception is Cragg, who is concerned to understand the Qur'an "from within" (1956a, p201). In doing so, he both calls Muslims to a re-assessment of their own thinking and urges Christians to the "fullest reckoning with the ruling themes of the Qur'an" (1956b, p63). This means that his approach can be seen as just as anti-Islamic as other "orientalist" approaches by Muslim critics (e.g. Tibawi 1979).

More overtly missionary approaches are taken by Hinds (1992 a and b) and Masood (1992). The latter, a convert from Islam, uses Qur'anic references to the former Scriptures to encourage Muslims to read the Bible. The former developed his approach in northern Nigeria, where there is a history of Muslims following Jesus as a result of reading the Qur'an (see Hulmes 1988). He encourages Christians to study the Qur'an and to use it to help Muslims towards a Biblical understanding of Jesus.

Probably the major determinant of approach is motivation. Thus the ancient apologists³ see the Qur'an as a book to be opposed, the academic orientalist treat it as an interesting religious or historical text, and some missionaries as a means of encouraging Muslims to consider the Christian faith. Some Christians go as far as treating it as a Scripture of equal validity with the Bible⁴.

All these agendas imply trying to understand the Qur'an from a Christian or western viewpoint. In contrast, the primary reason for reading the Qur'an in this study will be that it is part of the context in that it determines the thinking of Muslims. The focus is not the understanding of the Qur'an, but of the people who believe in it.

Cragg (1956a) says

It is imperative . . . that the Christian strive to enter as fully as he may into the Qur'anic world, with the painstaking ambition to know it from within. p201

However, the "Qur'anic world" perceived by Christians is not necessarily that of Muslims in Elswick. For the purposes of this study, western and Christian understandings of the Qur'an are irrelevant; and Islamic *tafsīr* (commentary) will be read not in order to understand the Qur'an, but in order to understand the commentators and the people influenced by them.

Most local Muslims are not Arabic speaking, so they have access to the Qur'an's meaning only through translations⁵. Of course, they reverence the Book, and most have read and recited it in Arabic since childhood. They are strongly influenced by it, but this is largely affective rather than cognitive (see 2.3 below). At the cognitive level, few can distinguish between what is in the Qur'an and what is in the *ḥadīth*; and some cannot distinguish the Islamic and the cultural in their practice. This situation is being challenged by some younger people reading the Qur'an in translation; and most Muslims in Elswick know more about Islam than do most whites about Christianity. However, the Qur'an is not their main direct source of knowledge.

It might seem, then, that the Qur'an is not the best source for understanding this Muslim community; and certainly understanding

developed from it will be limited. But

as the primary Islamic source of authority it must be important;
it is accessible as an object of study, whereas popular beliefs are
sparsely documented⁶ and would have to be presented anecdotally
or through survey techniques;

it provides parallels with the Bible that can aid comparative
understanding;

it pervades thinking, whether consciously or not.

So, then, it is sensible to go to the Qur'an as the basis for
understanding the Islamic context of the study. The question then
remains: if local Muslims seldom read the Qur'an with understanding,
how can I understand it from their point of view? Do they have a
point of view?

The answer is that they do, but that they get Qur'anic teaching
mainly through intermediaries - usually first through their mothers,
but then through people who are accepted as having religious
knowledge, whether *imāms*, *holy men*, *ḥuffāz*⁷ or women with a
reputation for teaching children. Their point of view is, in turn,
influenced by the teaching within particular communities, and these
communities have translations and commentaries that they consider
authoritative. It is these commentaries that have given me a
framework for understanding the Qur'an (see 3.2.1).

For the purposes of this study, Islam is what local Muslims practise
rather than a theoretical system based on Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. Because
the Muslims are diverse, so are their beliefs and practices, and the
commentaries chosen show a range of approaches. Sometimes
interpretations clash, and one commentator is seen by another as not
authentically Muslim. It is not the place of this researcher to enter
into their discussions, but to listen to them in order to understand
her community.

We should note here a mis-match between motivations in reading the
two Scriptures. The intention is to read the Bible in order to find
out how it ought to be interpreted, but to read the Qur'an as it is
interpreted. This comes dangerously close to comparing the theory of

one faith with the practice of another. Since human beings are usually better at deciding what ought to be done than at doing it, this can be an unfair device for elevating one's own faith and denigrating another.

Such, however, is not the intention. The aim is not to decide which system is "better", but to understand the other and become more faithful in discipleship. There is an underlying commitment that Christianity is true, but not that Christians are therefore better than Muslims. Rather, the assumption is that Christians - including the researcher - often fall short of what they ought to be, and the expectation is that the study will produce challenges for them as well as for Muslims.

2.3.2 Muslims and the Qur'an

Muslim approaches to the Qur'an are determined by motivations and understandings. This applies not only to interpretations but also, and perhaps more importantly, to uses of the Qur'an. Many of these are non-cognitive⁸, partly because of lack of Arabic, and partly because of beliefs about revelation. Such uses may not appear relevant to a study that focusses on stories and is presented in a cognitive way. However, they are important to Muslim people and must therefore be acknowledged.

Rather than looking at what the Qur'an says about itself, we consider what Muslims say about the Qur'an using

a range of appropriate Muslim commentators (see 3.2.1),

a popular Pakistani book for women (Bahishti Zewar, Thanvi 1990⁹)

an introduction to the Qur'anic sciences from the influential Islamic Foundation in Leicester (Von Denffer 1983a).

a book written for U.K. secondary school children which is increasingly to be seen in Muslim homes in Elswick (Sarwar 1984).

A The origin and nature of the Qur'an

While western scholars discuss historical and literary sources, Muslims generally see these as irrelevant: the source of the Qur'an is believed to be God Himself. Sarwar writes:

The Qur'an is from Allah. Each word of it is a revealed word. It was sent down to Muhammed (pbuh) through the angel Jibrā'il.

p32-3

The Qur'an, it is believed, is exactly as God sent it, having been protected by Him to the last diacritical point.

The question is then how the Qur'an came to be in human language and its current form. Von Denffer (p24) gives the standard view that it was with God from eternity. From thence it descended to the lowest heavens on the *laylat al-qadr*, the night of power, and was then transmitted in stages to Muhammad through Jibrā'il (Gabriel). Thus its origin is not in Muhammad or in any other human agency, but only in God. Interpretation is then not on the basis that the Qur'an was produced by a human context, but that it was spoken into a human context. It is helpful to understand the human context in order to understand the content of the Qur'an, but not in order to find its origin (see Maududi Vol 1, p7-20).

On this basis, Von Denffer (p17) defines the Qur'an as:

The speech of Allah, sent down upon the last Prophet Muhammed, through the Angel Gabriel, in its precise meaning and precise wording, transmitted to us by numerous persons, both verbally and in writing.

Inimitable and unique, protected by God from corruption.

He also notes the names by which it refers to itself:

furqān - criterion; *tanzīl* - sent down; *nūr* - light;
dhikr - reminder; *hudan* - guidance; *rahīmāh* - mercy;
majīd - glorious; *mubarak* - blessing; *bashīr* - announcer;
nadhīr - warner.

p18

Usmani further describes it as "the companion of loneliness, a guidance in worldly affairs, a light in darkness, a peace in turmoil" (p vii).

This implies that the Qur'an is God's speech-act. He does not only tell people what to do: He effectively calls them to do it¹⁰. Further, it is impossible to separate content from form. The language in which it was given is intrinsic to its nature, and the Qur'an is not the same Book if translated. Translation can give the "meanings"¹¹, but neither convey the style nor carry the blessing.

B. The function and use of the Qur'an

If the Qur'an as the word of God is active as well as informative, the believer can expect it to do things when it is read. Sarwar says:

The superb style of the Qur'an has a tremendous effect on its readers. It totally changes the pattern of life of those who believe and practise its teachings. It leaves a soothing effect on the mind of the reader, even if he does not fully understand its meaning. p34

There are two areas here: that of responding to teaching by belief and action, and that of the reading in itself, regardless of understanding.

B.1 In the area of belief and practice, the Qur'an has a cognitive function. It informs about the attributes of God, the principles of causality and the reality of judgement, and provides principles for living (Azad p6ff). The first three provide a world view which encourages obedience to the last.

Maududi describes the Qur'an as "the blue-print and guidebook of a message, of a mission, of a movement" (Vol 1, p24), and Usmani the main purpose of studying it as "to know the good pleasure of God and pursue for it (sic), and to know the things of God's displeasure and abstain from them" (pvi). The main aim of seeking to understand the Qur'an is, then, putting it into practice: as will be seen (B in 2.4.1), discerning laws for action is an agreed focus of Qur'anic interpretation.

However, there is no such agreement about how to discern them: Usmani's comment comes in the context of a refutation of Maududi. The translator's introduction to Usmani uses some strong language here (pvi, my italics):

Now a new Tafsir written by Abul Ala Maududi in Urdu is being spread in English speaking nations. This Tafsir . . . is distantly away from the traditional course of our past scholars . . . Maududi has deviated from the traditional course of the eminent scholars of the Holy Qur'an . . . That is why the righteous Ulema have declared him a Heretic. His obnoxious criticism against the Prophets, Sahaba, Ulema and Mashaekh is a prominent feature of his writings undermining the established authorities and inventing a new Modern Religion. Tafhimul Qur'an is an effort of his own imagination.

The main complaint is that Maududi does not follow traditional authorities. It is not that he is ignorant of these, but that he works directly with text and *ḥadīth*, apparently by-passing the scholarly tradition that has intervened. This is seen by many as invalid. Usmani's translator warns:

Tafsir . . . is the translation of God's conscience into words of interpretation. God's conscience is hidden in the Qur'an. Any such commentary that is away from God's conscience is not a Real Tafsir. If some element of Nafs (self) is amalgamated in Tafsir it is wrong. If some element of personal whims and fancies is mixed with the Tafsir it is wrong. Tafsir means: "It is what God means". pxxiv

He goes on to stipulate the two qualifications of a commentator: first "purification", which implies following a recognised sheikh, and then "comprehensive knowledge of all branches of religion" (pxxv).

Thus, despite agreement about the nature and function of the Qur'an, there are differences as to how it should be used, and about who can interpret it. It is a modern version of the ancient controversy about the legitimacy of *tafsīr bi-r-ra'y* and the closing of the doors of *ijtihād*¹³.

Von Denffer (chapter 6) outlines the traditional categories of *tafsīr*:

Tafsīr bi-r-riwāyah, interpretation by transmission, explains the Qur'an by referring to authoritative sources: first other parts of the Qur'an, then explanations attributed to Muhammad in the *ḥadīth*, and explanations from his companions and then other recognised early *mufasssīrīn* (practitioners of *tafsīr*).

Tafsīr bi-r-ra'y, interpretation according to opinion, uses reason and judgement, but on the basis of *tafsīr bi-r-riwayah*

Tafsīr bi-l-ishārah, interpretation from signs, seeks inner meanings available only to the initiated.

Von Denffer, whose publishers also publish a number of Maududi's works, notes that *tafsīr bi-r-ra'y* is disallowed by some, but distinguishes between the praiseworthy and the blameworthy. The former is in agreement with *ḥadīth* and *sharī'ah*, based on a firm knowledge of the various Qur'anic sciences, and carried out by a

person of sound faith and piety. Without this, it is "based on mere opinion and must be rejected" (p133).

Despite the range of opinions, then, it is agreed that no interpretation is valid that ignores or conflicts with the received commentary from Muhammad and other early authorities. There is also agreement that interpreters should be qualified in faith, in piety and in knowledge¹⁴.

B.2 In the area of reading without necessarily understanding, the Qur'an has a non-cognitive function. As suggested above, this is its most important function in the lives of Muslims in Elswick. They use the Qur'an as part of their worship and in order to receive blessing. They recite it, memorise it, and use it when in trouble.

Recitation is part of the *ṣalaḥ* prayers, but also an act of devotion in itself. It is said to carry blessings. Usmani quotes the *ḥadīth*:

Hazrat Ibn Masud reported God's Messenger (pbuh) as saying, "If anyone recites a letter of God's Book he will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed gets a tenfold reward." p xxii

Even if recitation is difficult, there are rewards for persevering:

If one cannot recite the Holy Qur'an easily, it should not be given up in disgust. One should go on reciting. This will be doubly rewarded.

Bahishti Zewar, p 406.

One might suppose that these more traditional sources would be more interested in recitation, and those that stress understanding less so. This, however, is not so. Von Denffer includes a section on etiquette with the Qur'an and correct methods of reading (p165ff), specifying requirements for ritual cleanliness and the correct handling of the Qur'an as well as for right intention (*nīyah*), pronunciation and modes of recitation¹⁵.

Memorisation is even more praiseworthy than recitation. Becoming a *ḥāfiẓ*, who has memorised the whole Qur'an, is thought to bring great rewards:

Hazrat Ali reported God's Messenger (pbuh) as saying, "If anyone recites the Qur'an, learns it by heart, declares what is lawful in it to be lawful and what is unlawful in it to be unlawful, God will bring him into Paradise and make him intercessor for ten of his

family all of whom have deserved Hell. Usmani, p xxi
On the other hand, forgetting what has been memorised is a major sin
(Bahishti Zewar p 405).

While few Muslims attempt to learn the whole Qur'an, all learn at least the first surah (*Fātiḥah*) and some other shorter surahs by heart, as these are needed for the *ṣalah* prayers. Most Muslim children in Elswick attend Qur'an classes, where they memorise some verses and learn how to recite.

Other uses of the Qur'an are less advertised, and are frowned upon by some. Musk (1989) describes popular practices that verge on magic, some of which are practised by Muslims in Elswick. Those who identify with Barelwi thinking would see these as valid expressions of Islam. Deobandis would reject them as superstitious and even evil¹⁶. Even the latter, however, use the Qur'an to ward off evil and to provide prescriptions for a variety of ills (See Bahishti Zewar p491).

These non-cognitive uses of the Qur'an are not directly applicable to the study of the stories that parallel the Genesis stories. However, they give an important indication of the ways in which my Muslim neighbours use the Qur'an, and therefore of the context in which they understand the stories.

Notes on 2.3

1. Cate includes Al-Kindi, John of Damascus, Peter the Venerable and Martin Luther here.
2. Cate considers Sir William Muir, Richard Bell, Arthur Jeffery, R. Blachère, W. Montgomery Watt and Kenneth Cragg.
3. For a modern parallel see Copleston 1989.
4. See Cantwell Smith 1991. Cate (1997) puts W. Montgomery Watt into this category, as does Al-Nowaihi (1976) Kenneth Cragg.
5. Of a sample of 6 Bangladeshi women, none could read Arabic, but 5 read Bengali translations - one daily, one weekly, and the other 3

occasionally.

6. See Barton 1986 on Bengalis in Bradford, Lewis 1985 on *pir* centred religion in Pakistan, and Musk 1989 on a variety of popular practices, mostly in the Arab world.

7. People who have memorised the whole Qur'an.

8. For a general treatment of the importance of affective, emotive and sensual aspects of Scriptures see Graham 1987.

9. For an assessment of the importance of this book, especially in the Deobandi movement, see Metcalfe 1984b.

10. Maududi (Vol 1 p24ff) gives an account of how the Qur'an's first hearers were changed by it.

11. Titles of translations often reflect this, e.g. Pickthall's (1953) The meaning of the Glorious Qur'an.

12. Two Arabic words are used, sometimes interchangeably. *Tafsīr* generally refers to explaining the text and finding legal implications, and *ta'wīl* to exploring inner and concealed meanings. It is with the former that we shall be concerned.

13. *Ijtihād* is the exercise of personal judgement, and attitudes to it vary through the Muslim world. See Doi 1984 (passim) and Speight 1988.

14. See also 2.4.2. For further discussion of types of *tafsīr*, see Ahmad 1968 and the introduction to McAuliffe 1991. Less traditional examples of interpretation can be found in Engineer 1991 and Mernissi 1991.

15. Cleanliness requirements have important implications for women, since they cannot be ritually clean during menstruation, and it is not permitted to touch the Qur'an (or pray or fast) when "unclean" (Bahishti Zewar p58). For those with young children, there are additional problems in that vomit, urine and stool are all considered pollutants (Bahishti Zewar, p34, 73).

16. Bahishti Zewar p19-22 lists practices that it considers heretical.

2.4 Reading the Bible and the Qur'an together

2.4.1 What is comparable?

In order to read Bible and Qur'an together, it has been necessary to seek both comparable material and comparable reading methods.

The Books are different in how they are perceived and studied. They are also different in form. While the Bible is organised in books written at different times and by different people, the Qur'an is organised in surahs, each of which may include verses from different times, but which were received by only one man. While most Biblical books have narrative frameworks, this is true of only two Qur'anic surahs (12 and 71). Most are organised around themes which may include narratives.

Although their organisations are different, both Books contain themes and narratives; and some of these are common to both. It would therefore be possible to seek to compare either. As stated in 1.4, it was originally intended to compare themes, but eventually decided to compare narratives.

The major theme considered was that of the unity of God. A variety of ideas cluster around this theme in the Qur'an:

There is none like God.

There is no point in appealing to anyone or anything else.

He is in control of everything.

He created everything.

Shirk (associating anything with God) is condemned.

Idols are argued against.

It is not unusual to find Muslim writers discussing such themes and using chains of references from different surahs (and *ḥadīth*) to present their arguments. Such a thematic approach would, then, be a possibility.

However, seeking themes around the unity of God in the Bible is more problematic. This is largely because monotheism is more often assumed than stated, and the associated ideas are pervasive. Thus, for example, Genesis 1-11 is seen as a presentation of monotheism

when considered against contemporary stories (see 3.6.1), but it nowhere states the unity of God. There are many other stories that can be considered as teaching the uniqueness of God and the futility of worshipping anything or anyone else, and few Biblical books are irrelevant to this theme.

There are several problems here. The first is size. The Old Testament is much longer than the Qur'an, and has a large amount of relevant material. The second is interpretation. The example of Genesis 1-11 indicates that the relevance of a particular passage may only emerge on the basis of thorough exegesis; and the historical and literary variety of the Old Testament again make the task too big for a study of this kind.

These are quantitative problems which could be overcome in time. More serious is the qualitative problem: that there is no guarantee that apparently similar themes deal with similar ideas. As Adams (1984) warns, similar words can obscure differences of meaning. It is therefore not easy to decide which Biblical themes parallel which Qur'anic themes.

All these problems can be side-stepped by choosing the story option. Although the stories are used differently, the Qur'anic commentators claim that they deal with the same characters and events as do the Biblical stories. It is therefore not difficult to identify parallels. Further, the stories are finite, and can be found in identifiable places in both Qur'an and Bible. This keeps the exegetical task practicable.

2.4.2 Complications

The story option eases the choice about what might be parallel, but is not without problems.

A. I am not a Muslim.

Anyone who really wishes to understand the Qur'an, irrespective of whether or not he believes in it, must divest his mind, as far as possible, of every preconceived notion, bias and prejudice, in order to embark upon his study with an open mind. Anyone who begins to study the Qur'an with a set of preconceived ideas is likely to read those very ideas into the Book. No book can be

profitably studied with this kind of attitude, let alone the Qur'an which refuses to open its treasure house to such readers. Maududi 1988 vol 1 p23

Although Maududi allows for wider interpretive possibilities than more traditional thinkers (see C.1 in 2.3.2), even in his terms it is impossible for me to understand the Qur'an. It is not only that it is not possible for anyone to divest themselves of preconceived notions¹, but that it is a long time since I studied Islam and its apologetic in order to see whether it was true and I should become a Muslim. Although I hope that I would still be willing to change were my reading to convince me differently, I read as a Christian and expecting to remain one.

As such, I would see it as not only my right but also my responsibility to read the Qur'an. It is my right because it claims to be public discourse, and must therefore be available for public scrutiny. It is my responsibility because it addresses itself to me as both Jew, Christian and descendant of Adam, and itself demands my attention and my response.

As in reading the Bible, then, the aim will not be to divest myself of preconceptions but to declare them, while at the same time seeking to understand what the Qur'an means to those who do believe it. In doing this, it is not so much my beliefs about the Qur'an that produce problems as my ideas of how to handle a religious text.

B. Method.

In studying the Bible, most Christians take some account of historical context. The situation in which it was written and the intentions of its human authors are necessary bases for understanding. If the text becomes divorced from the world that produced it and to which it primarily refers, it functions differently. Christian readers are also aware of the divine context: the Bible as the Word of God cannot be separated from its divine author any more than it can from its human authors. But the two sources of Scripture are seen as complementary and not contradictory.

The problem for the Christian coming to the Qur'an is that (s)he naturally thinks in terms of the human context. (S)he is aware of the history of Muhammad and the rise of Islam, and so reads the Qur'an as arising out of that context. The Muslim, on the other hand, sees the Qur'an as coming from outside the context: its origin is not divine and human, but divine and therefore not human. In logical terms, the divine and the human have a NAND relationship.

Of course, the Qur'an is understood as coming into a context, and the commentators look at the occasions of revelation and at how particular *āyahs* were used by Muhammad; but they do not see the revelations as having been determined by the situation. Some regulations are given which apply to certain situations and are then abrogated, but the determining factor is never the situation itself.

What this means is that, from a Christian point of view, a step in interpretation appears to be missing. It is valid from a Muslim point of view to handle the Qur'an as direct divine speech, since the step of human authorship has been omitted. Authorial intention is of primary importance, but the author is understood as being God, and His meaning is non-negotiable. The historical and critical apparatus used by Christians as a background to interpretation of the Bible is therefore invalid.

We can go further and say that it is impossible: if the Qur'an is direct divine speech, then the world behind the text is not on the earth and cannot be accessed by human sciences. The world into which the text came can help us to understand the questions it was addressing, and therefore the text itself, but cannot explain its origin².

The western tendency is to brand Islamic *tafsīr* "pre-critical", but this can be deceptive. As might be expected in a religion so centred in its Book, a vast critical apparatus for its interpretation has developed. It is not that a step in interpretation is missing but that it has been replaced.

In the Islamic system, the Qur'an is interpreted and applied using:

Hadīth - reports about what Muhammad and his companions said and did.

Ijmāc - the consensus of Muslim people.

Qiyās - analogical reasoning.

These might be seen as roughly parallel with:

Context - when the Scripture was produced and how it was understood.

Community - the tradition of interpretation and the context of faith.

Application - deciding how what was written "then" relates to "now".

Muslims have given at least as much time to studying *hadīth*, *ijmāc* and *qiyās* as have Christians to context, community and application. The *hadīth* have been painstakingly collected and exhaustively scrutinised. *Ijmāc* has been investigated and codified. *Qiyās* has been defined and taught.

However, there are important differences. The Bible and the Qur'an are seen as given in different ways and for different purposes. A corollary of difference in ideas of revelation is a different understanding of authority, and that of difference in purpose is a different agenda.

The corollary of the Bible being both human and divine is that it was produced by a divine-human partnership, through the agency of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3v16, 2 Pet 1v21). That is, its authority derives from divine-human relationships. Where the Qur'an functions as God's active speech, the Bible can rather be seen as speech arising from God's active relationships which have communicative force.

The difference can be seen in Biblical and Qur'anic ideas of covenant (see C.2 in 3.4.1 and A.8 in 3.4.3). The covenant relationship recorded in the Bible is also the act of God that results in the Bible, and that Bible in its turn affects the lives of its readers. In contrast, Qur'anic

covenants are established by prophetic words which put the human partners under obligation. It is these words that are the Qur'an.

If the nature and authority of the Bible have to do with relationship, it is not surprising that agendas in its interpretation have also to do with relationships. This can be seen across the whole spectrum of Christian approaches: concern for relationships with God, with self, with the poor, between genders, within the state or with the environment underl many discussions about doctrine and practice.

Agendas for Qur'anic interpretation include the discovery of right belief, but focus on finding principles and rules for right action. The system of *ḥadīth*, *ijmā'* and *qiyās* has developed in the context of *sharī'ah* - Islamic law³. In orthodox Sunni Islam, authority is vested in Qur'an, *ḥadīth* and *ijmā'* and in those qualified to relay them and apply *qiyās*, and this is why the individual cannot claim right interpretation through personal interaction with the text. Although there are parallels to the system of context, community and application, it is critiqued and used differently.

The *ḥadīth* may be used to help understand verses with reference to the context into which they were spoken, but that is not their most important role. Rather, they are used because they present Muhammad's comments and actions, and Muhammad as *rasūl* is both the authoritative reader and the authoritative performer of the Qur'an (see also Speight 1988).

The collection process was also determined by ideas of authority, so that the authoritative reading of the Prophet is accessed through a chain of secondary authorities. Each *ḥadīth* has two parts: the *isnād* which gives the chain of narrators⁴ and the *matn* or content. When they were collected, both *isnād* and *matn* were systematically scrutinised, each *ḥadīth* being either rejected or classified according to the strength of its probability of originating with the Prophet⁵.

Ijmā' implies more than consensus in a current believing community or taking into account the history of past responses to the text. It

requires that interpretation, especially as it concerns legal rulings, be constrained by what certain early Muslims and jurists have said. That is, it recognises a chain of authoritative precedent.

Qiyās is not a personal, existential application to a current situation. It is a defined way of reasoning from Qur'an, *ḥadīth* and *ijmāʿ*, and must be entrusted to suitably qualified people. As noted in 2.3.2, there is controversy here about whether *ijtihād*, the exercise of individual judgement, has been legitimate since the classical codifications of law. Those that say it is not only possible but also necessary nevertheless insist on its being practised according to given methods and by people with correct personal and educational qualifications (see Doi 1984 p78-80).

Qur'anic interpretation, then, must be mediated through the proper authorities. Although Biblical interpretation is done in the context of believing communities and their creeds, personal readings are often encouraged. This reflects the idea that, as divine authorship was mediated through the Holy Spirit indwelling the writers, so the Holy Spirit in the church and individual readers enables valid existential interaction with the text. Islam has no parallel to the Holy Spirit⁶: encounter with the divine is most commonly perceived as coming through the non-cognitive uses of the Qur'an described in 2.3.2.

C. The Biblical and Qur'anic versions of the stories are not independent.

Although the Qur'an has in practice become detached from the Bible (see 2.2.1 above), it assumes knowledge of the Biblical stories. Details are filled in by the commentators, using material derived from Christian and Jewish sources (see Von Denffer 1983a p135-6). The stories assumed are often those of rabbinic tradition rather than of the Bible itself.

There are several possible approaches to the relationship between Biblical and Qur'anic stories:

C.1 Historical: Such scholars as Andrae (1955), Katsch (1954), Newby (1986) and Torrey (1933) consider the origins of Qur'anic material,

asking how it might have developed from Biblical, Jewish and Christian sources. This can be seen as part of the Judaeo-Christian agenda that needs to explain the existence of the Qur'an other than as God's direct Word (see 2.3.1). From an Islamic point of view, the idea that there is a historical link between Muhammad's hearing of stories and the words in the Qur'an implies a denial of its revealed status (see Tibawi 1979). For the purposes of this study, then, this approach is not appropriate.

C.2 Literary: The question here is how the stories relate structurally and thematically, and how they function as narratives. This is not a question generally asked by Muslim commentators, but it is not, I think, repugnant to them. The agenda is a western one, but some Muslims have also used it. The most popular story for narrative comparison is that of Joseph, which is unique in the Qur'an in that it occurs only once and occupies a whole surah (12), and it is therefore an accessible candidate. The approach was introduced by Waldmann (1985), and subsequent studies have come from Mir (1986), Rendsburg (1988) and Abdel Haleem (1990). Kister (1988) has done a structural study of the Qur'anic Adam stories. Although these studies produce useful insights, they generally ignore classical Muslim interpretations.

C.3 Theological: Here, the Qur'an is seen as using the stories as part of its theological discourse, and the question is how that discourse relates to that of the Biblical stories. This is the interest of Parks (1987) in his study of Abraham as a symbol in Christianity and Islam. He compares the New Testament and Qur'anic treatments of Abraham, and traces the ways in which the Abraham story is used. However, this is a comparison of developments of the Genesis story rather than of Genesis and the Qur'an.

The major concern of the current study will be theological, with the question of how Qur'anic uses of the stories suggest ideas of God, humankind and the rest of creation. This will be done by looking at the details of the stories themselves as well as by asking how they are used in their particular Qur'anic contexts. The Biblical and

Qur'anic stories will be seen as alternative narrative worlds presenting alternative, and often competing, theological systems.

D. Contexts and uses.

The differences in uses and contexts of stories are at least as important as those between stories themselves. The Bible can be seen as essentially telling a story, so that narrative forms the structure and is often itself the message. The Qur'an, while being linked with the story of Muhammad, does not tell a story. Rather, it is spoken into a story and uses former stories to present and illustrate its arguments.

While in Genesis the stories provide contexts for each other and are themselves the primary communication, in the Qur'an they are woven into the teaching that speaks into the untold story of Muhammad. Their context is not historical, and it would be difficult from the Qur'an alone to guess their chronological order. Sometimes, as in the case of the Surahs of Joseph (12) and of Noah (71), the stories are told as complete in their own right; but then they are apparently without context. The commentators may discuss the details of the stories in historical terms, but for meanings they look at a different kind of context. They ask when the passages were given, what Muhammad said about them, and what issues they underline in the particular contexts in which they are used⁷.

Perhaps the nearest parallels in the Bible are the analogical and exemplary uses of Old Testament stories in the New Testament. Here, stories are used to illustrate points and to underline the authority of the ideas. The arguments themselves could be essentially the same without the use of the stories⁸. Another possible parallel is the parables of Jesus. Here, the stories are self-contained, and are told to make particular points. Their contexts for understanding are the situations into which they are spoken.

Further, the Qur'anic stories are seldom to be found in only one surah. They usually need to be pieced together from various places. This raises a question as to whether they are single stories, and

makes the use of narrative study methods problematic. The usual method of the commentators is to see, for example, the Adam stories as one story, and to harmonise them. Since this is the common Muslim perception, I shall treat each set of references as a unified story. However, since the references are usually scattered, no analysis of literary structure will be attempted.

E. Pre-understanding

The Qur'an deals with ideas of God and of human beings. However much effort Christians may put into understanding it, we approach it with already established ideas on the same subjects.

Considering stories rather than themes should aid this, but the stories brings problems of their own. This is because I already know the Biblical versions of the stories. When I read the Qur'anic Noah story, I do it from the background of the Biblical story. I already feel that I know Noah and his family and the people who were drowned, and assume that the Qur'anic Noah is essentially the same person very much as I assume that the words in the Qur'an refer to the same concepts that I use.

The problem has not gone away: it has only changed shape. I am in the position of the person who sees the film after reading the book - presented with a new version which is interesting but which doesn't quite fit. This makes it difficult to enter the world of the film without reservations! It is therefore necessary to separate the stories before comparing them.

2.4.3 How, then, shall I read?

Given these complications, how shall I read the Bible and the Qur'an together?

A. The relationship between the two Scriptures

The major concern is, as has been stated, theological. The Qur'anic stories will therefore be handled as theological discourse taking place within the world of the stories. That is, the Qur'anic versions act as an Islamic commentary on the Bible expressed within the worlds of the

stories. It is arguable that this is also what the Genesis stories do with contemporary stories (see 3.6.1), although in both cases the actual historical dependence is a point of contention. In both cases, theological similarities and differences can be sought by tracing similarities and differences between the stories.

A parallel can be found in the genre of Midrash, where Aggadic stories comment on Biblical narratives by offering expansions and explanations that make the Scripture relevant to particular audiences. It has often been noted that the Qur'anic material is related to Aggadah in content (e.g. Katsch 1954, Newby 1986), but this is not the point at issue here. Rather, the Qur'an is to be seen as using the stories in a midrashic way.

There is, however, a major difference with Jewish Midrash: that of authority. Even when Aggadic stories are in direct contradiction, they are not in competition. Contradictions do not matter, since Midrash is on the level of explanation, exploration and application and nothing has to be built on it. Halakkah (law) should not be based on Aggadah (see Goldin 1986). Thus Biblical stories can be re-told so that they speak into particular situations, but the re-telling is not binding for any other situation. New tellings are always possible.

The Qur'anic stories, on the other hand, are viewed as revelation. An outsider might see them as a re-telling into the particular situation of Muhammad, but from an Islamic point of view they are definitive versions valid for all times. Thus, although their content may be similar to that of the Aggadah, their status is different. They claim not only to be the right interpretations of the Biblical stories, but also to correct them and to have priority over them. They have become detached from the original Biblical stories, and constitute separate narratives in their own right.

This means that Bible and Qur'an present competing worlds, and that the Qur'an acts as the competing system of 2.2. This competition arises in accounts of common characters and events, and can be seen as characteristic of the relationship between Christianity and Islam

where confrontation takes place within an arena of much common ground. Hinduism and Buddhism, for example, also offer stories that differ from the Biblical ones, but they are different stories: although they may contradict, they do not compete for the same ground. Judaism offers competing interpretations, but agrees that the Bible is normative. It is only Islam that offers a non-negotiable, competing version of the same stories.

B. Focussing the reading

For both Muslims and evangelical Christians, reading Scriptures involves reference to authors. There is, however, disjunction between the Muslim understanding of God as author, and the Christian understanding of human authorship through divine inspiration. The range of methods that focus on human authors and their worlds is not used by traditional Qur'anic commentators. Thus, although both Scriptures will be read in the context of commentators' reflections on authorial intentions, no comparison will be attempted in this area.

For both systems reading is driven by the reader's situation, but again the ideas are different. The Muslim commentators read in communities of faith and seek to answer contemporary questions according to codified ways of application. I read in my community of faith, but on the understanding that meanings can be discovered through direct encounter with the text. Thus, although the Qur'an will be read as far as possible with reference to the local community, and the whole enterprise focusses on the reading of the Bible by a particular reader in a particular situation, the actual comparison of texts will not be reader-centred.

What is common to both Muslims and Christians is a concern with what the text actually says. Both ask questions about the details of the stories, and discuss plots, characters and points of view as well as words, phrases and ideas. It is here, therefore, that the comparative exercise will begin: as the Qur'an is seen as theologising within the stories, so our basic comparison will be within the Qur'anic and Biblical narrative worlds. Only then will concepts be abstracted.

C. A map of the comparative reading.

The reading of Bible and Qur'an together parallels the reading of the Bible in the world described in 2.1.4. Instead of a conversation between the reader's world and the Bible's world, we can set up a conversation between Bible and Qur'an, bringing questions from one to the other in order to recognise similarities and differences. The circle of conversation becomes:

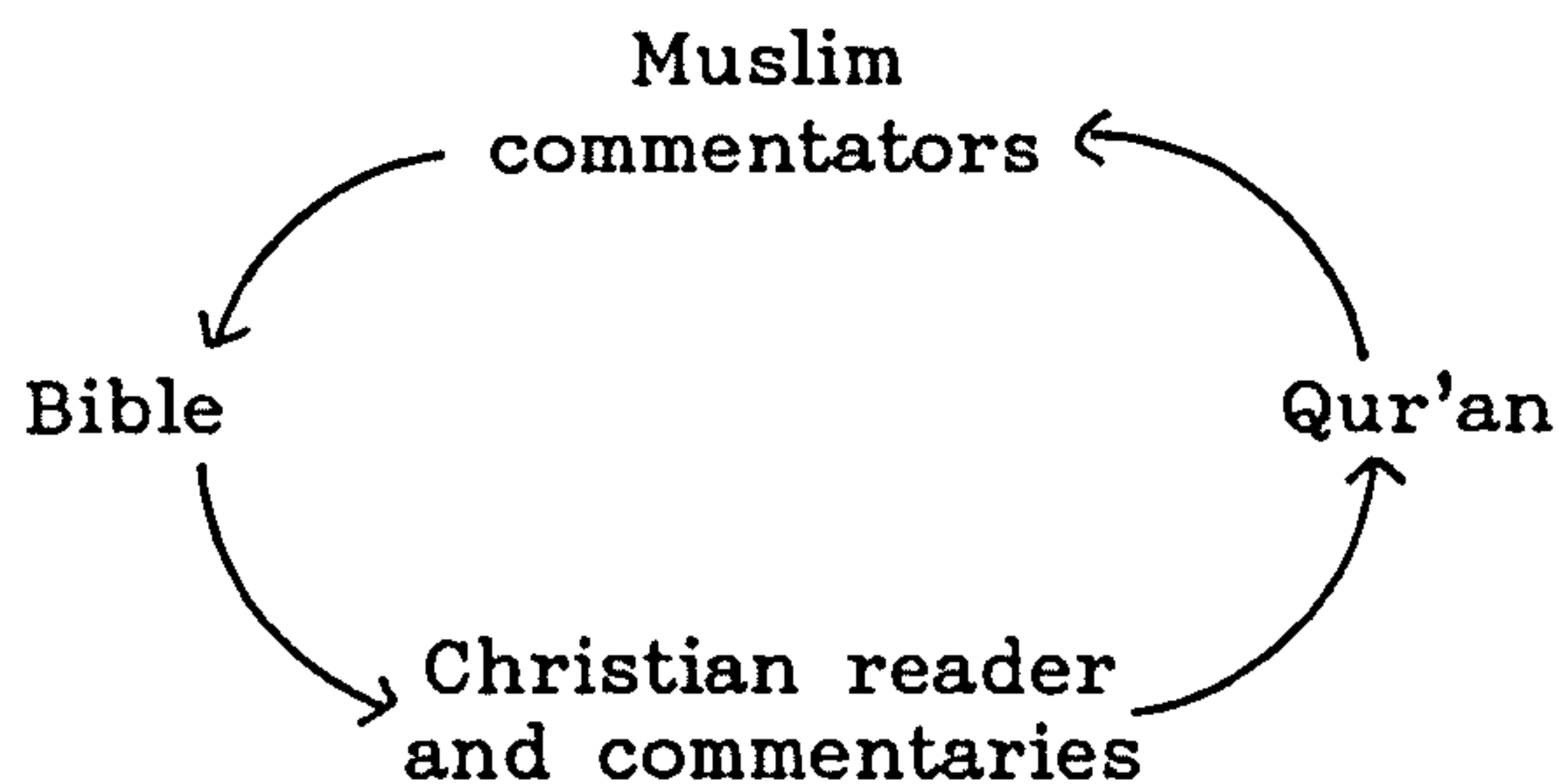


Fig 1

There is here the asymmetry between readings of Bible and Qur'an noted in 2.3.1. The reading of the former is consciously in the context of the faith of the Christian reader and therefore of her own perceptions of the text: the reading of the Qur'an is mediated only through the commentators. This indicates an attempt to deal with complication A by, as far as possible, listening to the interpretations of Muslims rather than imposing a Christian interpretation onto the Muslim Book.

The reading aims to discern similarities and differences, and hence to set up an analogical system parallel to that of 2.1.4, but where A and B now indicate Bible and Qur'an rather than Bible and situation:

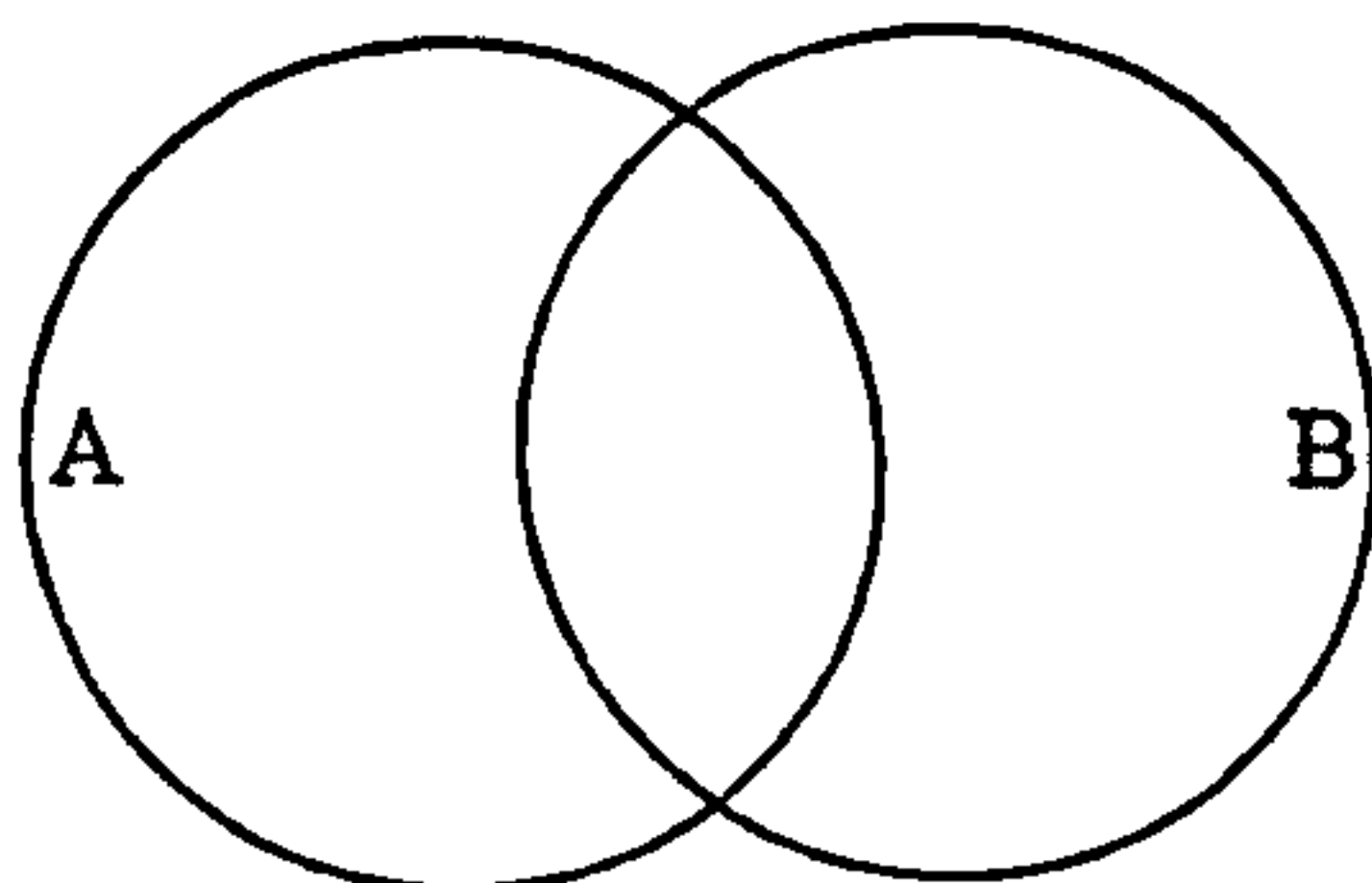


Fig 2

This is relatively easy to set up for narrative details, but the question then arises as to whether similarities and differences in detail imply similarities and differences in meaning. The process must therefore be continued in order to discern a second system where A and B are meanings rather than details. The two systems are not necessarily the same.

Two points might be made here. First, the reader's world appears to have been excluded from the system. This is only apparent, since the reader in her world is interacting with both texts and commentaries, and she is personally recognising the analogical system. She has been excluded from Fig 2 at this stage for clarity, and will be included below in section 2.6.

Second, while the worlds of Genesis (G) and Elswick (E) of fig 2 of 2.1.4 initially appear to have little in common, those of the Biblical (B) and Qur'anic (Q) stories at first sight appear to be very similar:

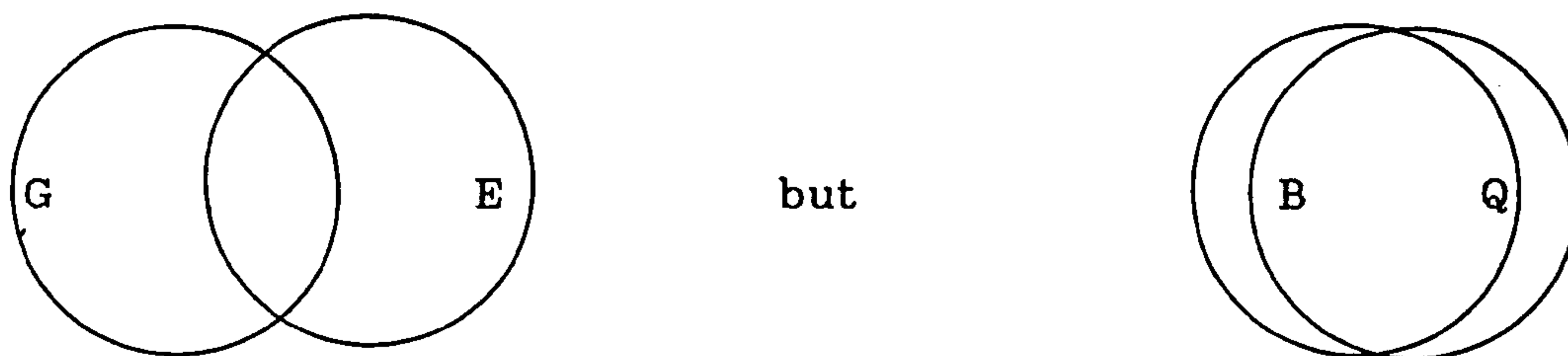


Fig 3

This reflects complication E above. The process of seeking similarities and differences helps to separate the stories and to appreciate each in its own right. Thus, where the conversation indicates that Genesis and Elswick share more than was at first suspected, Biblical and Qur'anic stories turn out to be less alike than they first appear:

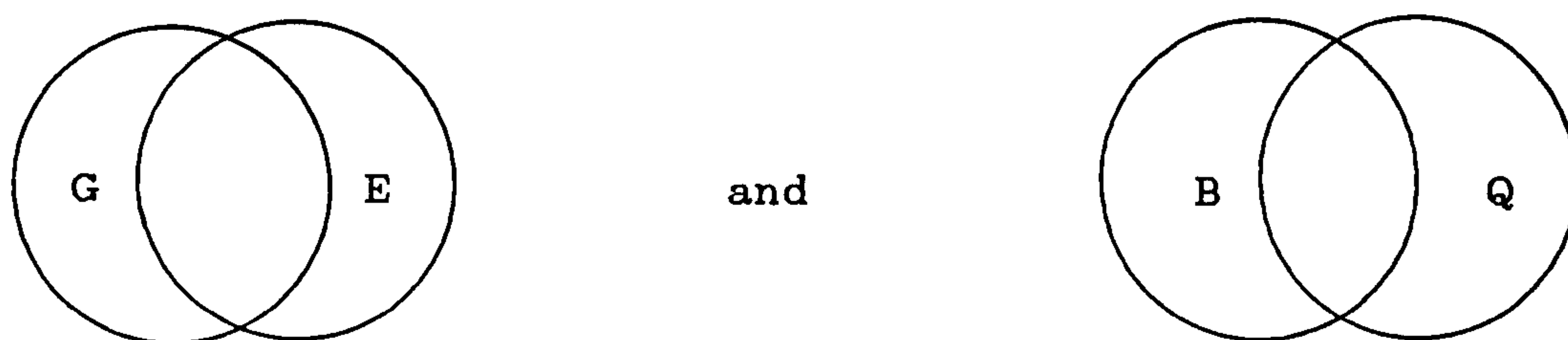


Fig 4

While the task of reading Genesis in Elswick is to find similarities-in-difference, that of reading the Bible stories with the Qur'an stories is more often to find differences-in-similarity. This will be reflected in the comparison of 3.4 as compared with the reflections of 3.5.

Notes on 2.4

1. See D'Costa 1993 and section 1.3.
2. There is a movement especially amongst feminist authors to take account of social contexts in interpretation, but this is not common, and the so-called modernist approaches of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have been largely rejected. An interesting study of Qur'anic teaching on women in its original context comes from sociologist Fatima Mernissi (1991). However, she is careful not to say that the context produced the text but that the text needs to be understood in its context. Abdullah 1992 goes further and discusses the possibility of a post-modern reading of the Qur'an.
3. See Doi 1984, chapters 3 and 4 for an account of the way these function as a basis of *sharī'ah*.
4. In the form, "A told me that B told him that C said that D said that E said that the Prophet said . . ."
5. The *isnād* was examined to ascertain whether the links of the chain could have met. The characters of the links were also investigated. The *matn* was checked for consistency with other teaching and for significance of content, and was considered stronger if transmitted by several people.
6. The title *rūḥ-ul-qudūs*, literally translated "holy spirit", is commonly used of the Angel Gabriel, who mediates the revelation to Muḥammad.
7. See Maududi Vol 4 p280 on ^{the} didactic nature of the Adam stories and Vol 3 p40 on the various Qur'anic uses of the Noah story.
8. E.g. Eve in 2 Cor 11v3, Hagar in Gal 4v22-31, Noah and Lot in 2 Pet 2v4-10.

2.5 "Reading" the community

The Bible reading is not only to be in the comparative textual context of the Qur'an, but also in the context of Christian life and mission in a particular community. This requires both observing and experiencing the community and reflecting on the Scriptures in the light of the community and the community in the light of the Scriptures.

2.5.1 "Reading" the community

There are many approaches to observing and interpreting - to "reading" - such communities. For example, on Muslim women in the U.K.:

Sheikh's (1991) The Red Box presents material from personal experience and observation as a novel.

Wilson's (1978) Finding a Voice and Ahmad's (1990) Dreams into Words anthologise the writings of women attending writing workshops.

Jeffery (1976) Migrants and Refugees - Muslim and Christian Pakistani families in Bristol has a more rigorous survey approach. However, she found formal methods of limited use, especially in the selection of interviewees. People selected through informal contacts were more cooperative than those selected through standard sampling techniques.

The studies in New Community (see Bibliography I: 2.3(b)) use various sociological techniques, but all focus on groups or families with whom the researcher is familiar.

On Elswick:

Davies' (1972) The Evangelistic Bureaucrat is a study of planning in part of Elswick. The author functions as a participant observer.

Taylor's (1976) study of Asian youths, The Half-way Generation, also focusses on West Newcastle. It uses more formal interview and survey techniques, but selects respondents from particular contact groups.

Campbell's (1993) Goliath: Britain's dangerous places includes Elswick in its study of the 1991 riots in Cardiff, Oxford and Tyneside. The approach is journalistic, and the material on Elswick is based on interviews, with no indication as to how respondents were selected.

Iqbal (1992), Women Talking, records snippets of interviews with West Newcastle women. Her initial intention was to use a questionnaire, but this made people nervous. General conversation produced more thorough answers to her questions. (p2).

A common pattern is that less formal methods are chosen for "reading" this kind of community.

Studies of Asians in Britain serve as helpful background to the Elswick study. Some illuminate family dynamics (e.g. Anwar 1985, Shaw 1988) and the stresses on second and third generation immigrants (Watson 1977, Mirza 1989, Eade 1990). Some consider the lives of Muslim women (Afshar 1989, Ahmad 1990, Mirza 1989, Knott and Khokher 1993). On Elswick itself, the local history group has produced a booklet on immigrant communities (Newcastle West Local Studies Multi-Cultural Project 1988), and the Racial Equality Council produces regular reports. There are also reports from various statutory and voluntary agencies (see 1.2 of Bibliography I).

All this contributes to understanding the community, but the interests of the present study are rather different, so that ways of "reading" are also different. On the conceptual level, interests are theological, and on the practical level, missiological. The questions are:

- * How is the community to be understood in relation to God?
- * How can Christians live here in a way that furthers God's mission?

The latter was the concern of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas report Faith in the City (1985), and there has been much consequent discussion of urban ministry (e.g. Ahem and Davie 1987, Bakke 1987, Harvey 1989, Adamson 1993). Studies recognise the presence of ethnic minority groups in many urban priority areas. However, there is little that focusses on

Christian ministry amongst Asians in such contexts¹, and material about mission amongst people of other faiths largely ignores issues raised by the urban priority environment.

How is the community to be "read" in the light of the theological and missiological intents, seeing both Muslim people and urban context?

First, it is "read" from the inside. Understanding has developed through being part of the community and sharing its experiences. In this the "reading" shares common ground with Davies (1972) and Iqbal (1992) as participant observers. It also shares Jeffery's (1976) practice of developing understanding through informal networks.

"Reading" in this way can be personal rather than subjective in that it develops in interaction with others and is open to correction. However, it can be neither systematic nor exhaustive. It cannot be systematic in that it is not possible to choose experiences or to systemise relationships. It cannot be exhaustive in that it is not possible to relate to all. In particular, either one reports crime or one does not, and either one opposes racism or one acquiesces in it. As both a "grass" and a "Paki-lover", I cannot have equal access to all sectors of the community.

The personal nature of the reading also implies limitations in reporting. It is not possible to report all that happens: selectivity is inevitable. More seriously, considerations of confidentiality impose severe limitations on discussion of specific situations.

Second, it is "read" through the Scriptures. That is, the Scriptures are used as a hermeneutic key, using the process of recognition and analogy described in 2.1.4. In particular, questions raised by the "reading" are taken to Genesis, which then provokes more questions.

2.5.2 Example: civil disturbances, September 1991

One of the most striking events in Elswick during the course of the study occurred in September 1991 (see 3.5.2). During the summer, disturbances had broken out in Cardiff, Oxford and Birmingham (see

Campbell 1993). The peak came on Tyneside, starting in North Shields and moving to West Newcastle with a spectacular blaze in the centre of our parish. It is instructive to consider the "readings" of the situation that followed.

A. A variety of readings.

The Times reported the disturbances with characteristic coolness, with a small picture of the blaze on page 2 (12.9.91). The local press gave it more space and more pictures (Evening Chronicle and Journal, 12.9.91). There followed national discussions on policing (Times 14.9.91), and the Times carried many diagnoses of the problems, variously blaming "liberal apologists for yobbery" and lack of punitive discipline (11.9.91), consumerism and materialism (16.9.91), family breakdown (24.9.91) and lack of church teaching (24.9.91).

However, it was the Archbishop of Canterbury who triggered major controversy. In a speech about church schools, he commented briefly on the "riots" on Tyneside and then said, "human wrongdoing is inextricably linked to social deprivation and illiteracy" (Times, 21.9.91). That the first part of his sentence mentioned "sinfulness" was ignored, and a heated debate on deprivation versus depravity arose.

Strong responses came from Newcastle clergy. The Bishop agreed that social deprivation was a factor, but a local vicar insisted that the main problems were moral and spiritual (David Holloway, Evening Chronicle 20.9.91). An Elswick vicar went further, saying that the Archbishop's comments were unhelpful and that

What happened last week was people purposefully, wilfully going out on the streets committing arson and attacking the police. It was an outbreak of wickedness. George Curry, Evening Chronicle 20.9.91

This appeared in the press as very polarised, despite the Archbishop's insistence that he did not condone criminal behaviour but wanted sin to be seen in its context (Independent 21.9.91). A meeting² of the Archbishop with church leaders in Elswick indicated agreement that causes were complex, and that deprivation was only one contributing factor.

In amongst all this, local people were simply trying to cope; and, despite media accusations, church members were deeply involved in the attempt.

The community was full of perplexity, fear and anger. Although there was no noticeable racist dimension to events in Elswick³, the Asian community was frightened, and rumours were rife. Asian shops heard that they were to become targets, and even the mosque was closed for evening prayers.

Organisations responded variously. Local radio gave detailed coverage. The police increased their presence. The council's Ethnic Minority Team set up a 24 hour help line. Schools sent pupils home early. Afterwards, when things settled down, the local residents' association increased its lobbying of police and council.

The churches also responded. Christians spent time talking with others on the streets, visiting the vulnerable, and trying to help people make sense of what was going on. Hospitality was offered to those who felt their homes might become targets, and members of ethnic minorities were visited to give assurance of support. There was also response in prayer - not only in Elswick, but in other parts of Britain and even across the world.

B. My "reading"

None of the above is without its importance, but the theological and missiological interests suggest particular questions.

Theological: How do we understand the situation in relation to God? This raises questions about responsibility to address to Genesis: Does it give pointers as to the nature and causes of deprivation? What does it teach about crime and depravity? What hope is there for the "rioters"? Are the "victims" innocent?

Missiological: How should Christians respond? This is not only in attitudes and actions, but also in explanation. The church needs to interpret events for its members, and also for shocked and confused people outside itself. In particular, a white Christian

faces the challenge of interpreting the situation with Muslim neighbours, who are frightened and angered by what they see white people doing.

All this was reflected in my personal experiences during the "riots" - being stopped by the police on my way to an Asian home on the Elswick Road, lying awake listening to radio reports and praying for God to hold back evil and protect the Asian community, offering hospitality, visiting frightened families, listening to teenagers and children, calling the fire brigade and the police . . .

It was at this time that my Biblical studies were focussing on Noah. As I was "reading" the community through personal involvement, I was also "reading" it through Scripture: the questions in my mind as I read Genesis were those raised by the riots; and the issues raised by Genesis were being taken with me into a community affected by them.

Thiselton (1992, p575) quotes Fuchs' delightful observation, "the hermeneutical principle for understanding the cat is the mouse", and adds, "Textual narrative cats await the varied mouse-situations which reactivate them." The disturbances acted as a particularly provocative mouse for the Genesis "cat": something of the result is recorded in the reflection on "Noah and the riots" in 3.5.2.

Notes on 2.5

1. Faith in the City includes only 2 pages (60-1) on "The Gospel and other faiths", although they are briefly considered in the section on "Minority ethnic groups and education" (p302-8). Lamb and Hooker 1986 and Burness 1989 tackle some relevant issues.
2. 29.9.91 - the media were excluded from this meeting, at which I was present.
3. In the trials of perpetrators of disturbances on the Meadow Well Estate, it became clear that there was a racist dimension there. (Evening Chronicle 13-16.7.92).

2.6 Genesis, Elswick and the Qur'an

We have considered the reading of the Bible, the reading of the Qur'an and the "reading" of community. The task is now to bring these together to achieve a reading of Genesis in the context of the Qur'an and Elswick. I have done this by carrying out my readings together, by consciously allowing them to interact, and by conversing, questioning and reflecting over a period of several years.

We recall the map of the system represented by Fig 4a of 1.2:

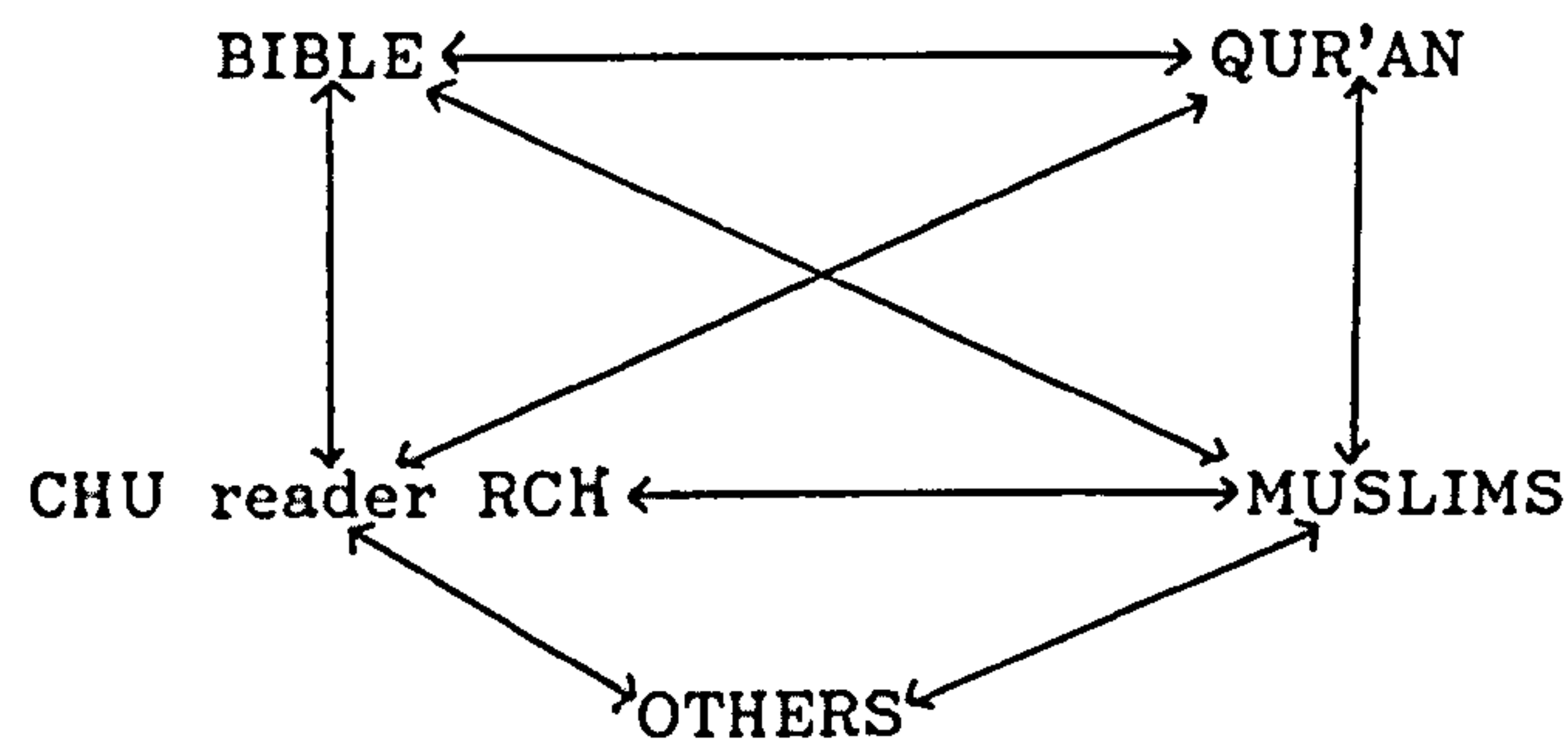


Fig 1

The chu-reader-rch/Muslims/others system can be described together as "Elswick", and the dynamic relationship between the parts mapped by an extension of the conversation, recognition, analogy scheme of 2.1.4 and 2.4.2. The conversation circle of Fig 1 becomes rather complex, as each point of the Genesis-Elswick-Qur'an triangle interacts with the other two:

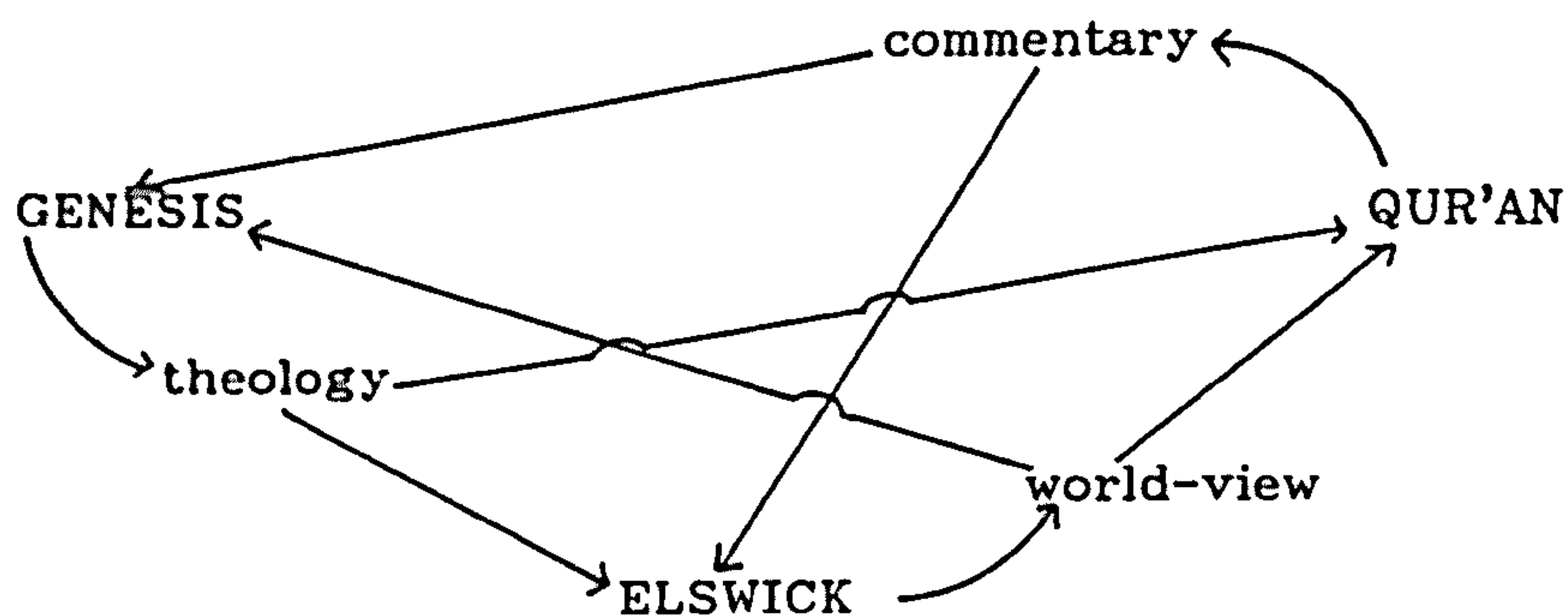


Fig 2

The resulting analogical system looks clearer:

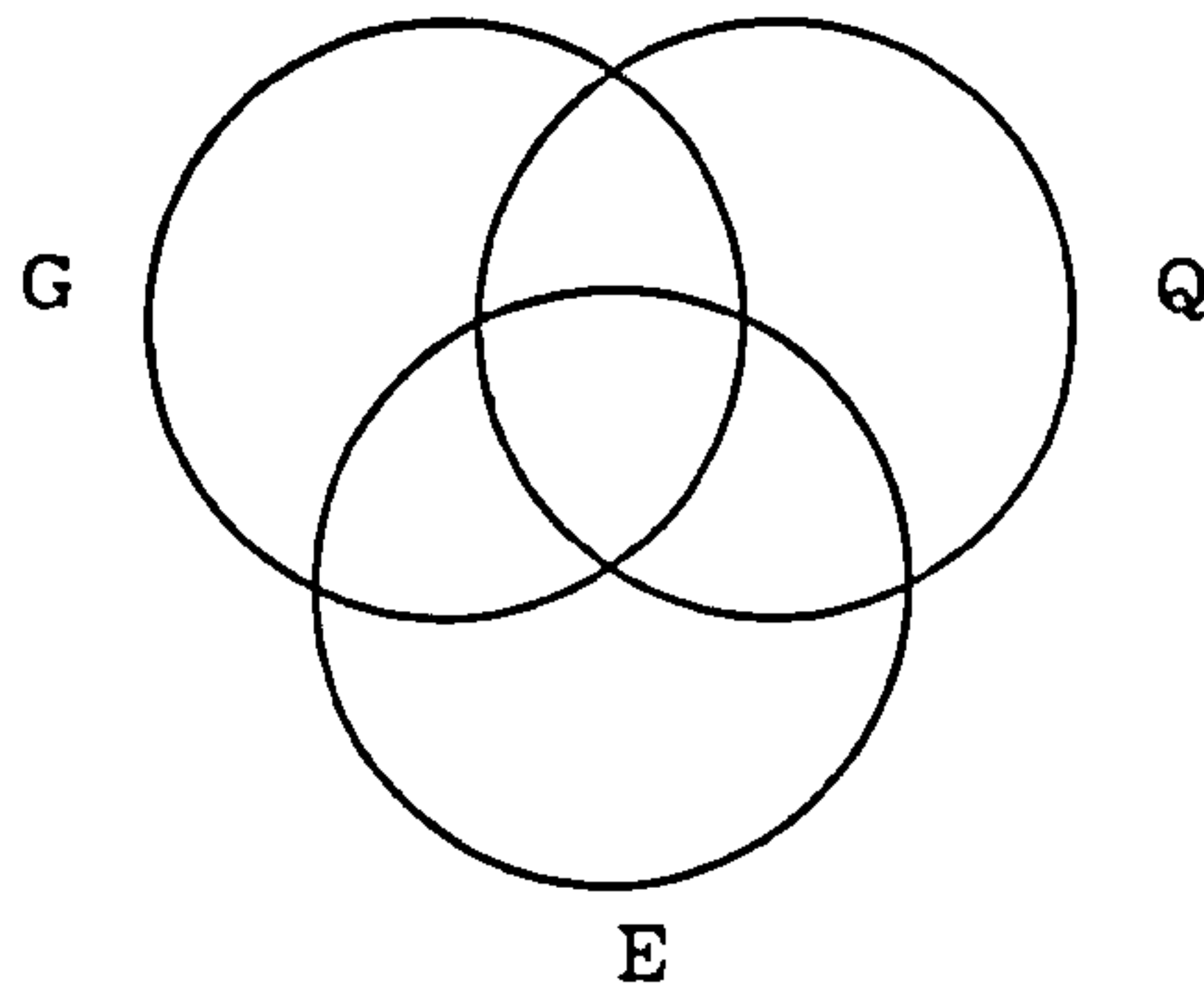


Fig 3

The reader is situated in circle E as part of the Elswick set, and is also present as the person who recognises the analogy.

In this diagram,

G∩Q represents common ground between Genesis and the Qur'an, where similarity of detail and of meaning are distinguished.

G∩E represents aspects of Elswick recognised in Genesis.

Q∩E represents aspects of Elswick recognised in the Qur'an.

G∩Q∩E represents aspects of Elswick recognised in both Qur'an and Genesis, and therefore common ground for Christians and Muslims living and working together in the area.

G∩E-Q and Q∩E-G indicate disagreements between Genesis and the Qur'an in understanding the community, and therefore in diagnosing and treating its problems. They therefore represent areas where Christians and Muslims will have to work hard for mutual understanding, and where Christians have a message that they want to share with Muslims in the course of their mission.

Chapter 3 describes the basic comparison which establishes the G-Q analogy (3.4). It then offers a taste of the dynamic of Fig 2 (3.5), and explores the implications of G∩Q∩E and G∩E-Q and Q∩E-G for mission (3.7). A focus throughout is on how the process affects the reading of the Genesis text, and an exposition of this is included as a major result (3.6).

3. The Study

This chapter presents the contextualised study that developed by the application of the methodology of 1.3 in the system of 1.2. The focus has been outlined in 1.4, and an exploration of method in chapter 2.

The system is, as has been said, complex, and the methods used multiple. In keeping with the principles of 1.3, an attempt has been made not only to describe the results of the study, but also to distinguish as clearly as possible between what has been observed, how observations have been made, how they have been used, and what conclusions have been drawn.

The structure of the chapter therefore approximates that of a scientific report. 3.1 deals with the overall aim. 3.2, Apparatus, describes the subjects, objects and instruments of study. 3.3 summarises and schematises the method developed according to the considerations of chapter 2. 3.4 presents the comparative data collected by reading the Scriptures. 3.6 offers an exposition that can be seen as the result of the contextualised reading, and 3.7 the conclusions that can be drawn for the mission of the church in Elswick and beyond.

A key stage, and the most difficult to describe, is the move from the comparison of 3.4 to the exposition of 3.6. This is the process of interpretation in community. 3.5 indicates the process through a series of reflections in Elswick. These are necessarily anecdotal, since the contextualisation is inevitably personal.

This analysis of the contextual and comparative process is, of course, a simplification. Since feedback is intrinsic to the methodology, the process has not moved through the stages in a linear fashion: what is recorded distinguishes the stages of study but only partially follows its time development. For example, the khalifah/image hermeneutic key (see 3.4.1 and 3.6) was identified only after a preliminary exposition had been written. It was then necessary to return to the comparison and reflection to test its validity. The

function/relationship distinction was confirmed, and 3.4 and 3.5 modified accordingly.

3.1 Aim

In brief, the aim is to listen to a Bible passage in a particular context in such a way that it can be faithfully heard and obeyed. The passage is Genesis 1v26-11v19, and the context the community served by the St Paul's Elswick Asian Project described in 3.2.2 below. This includes many Muslims, so that the context includes Islam and the Qur'an.

The reading in context aims

- to come to an understanding of the context and the people who form it

and thence

- to correct the understandings of the Christians involved,
- to clarify the views of the Muslims, and to see where they coincide with and where they oppose Biblical views,
- to point out ways of obeying Christ's commissions to love our neighbours and to make disciples of all nations,
- to put into practice what is learnt.

That old meanings will be seen in new contexts and new meanings may be recognised is an inevitable part of the comparative process. The mere reading of another religious text affects the reader even before the effects are recognised, and therefore affects perceptions of the Bible. Thus, although no deliberate attempt will be made to seek new readings of Genesis, it is to be hoped that reading in a new context will "uncover possibilities hidden by centuries of familiarity" (Clooney 1993, p159).

3.2 Apparatus

The main apparatus is the reader, described in 2.1 above. To this are added books to aid the understanding of Genesis and the Qur'an, and the experience of living in the Elswick community.

3.2.1 Books

A. For the understanding of Genesis:

The chapters will be read with the aid^{of} commentaries. Because literature on Genesis 1-11 is extensive, it has been necessary to limit material used. For the most part, Wenham, G.J., Genesis 1-15, Word Books, 1987 is followed. The Word Biblical Commentaries, of which this is the first volume, aim to combine scholarship with a commitment to Biblical authority.

Further, while Wenham notes insights from theories of textual development, he is cautious about their validity and unwilling to build exegesis on disputed ideas (pxxxv-xlv). Rather, he sees the commentator's prime task as understanding the text in its present form, and its meaning for its final editor and original readers (pxxxvi, xlv). Finally, his interest is mainly theological, reflecting what he considers to be the concerns of Genesis (pliii). All this is compatible with the principles of chapter 2. Unless otherwise indicated, therefore, Wenham's exegesis will be assumed as the basis of my Genesis reading.

The other main commentaries used are:

Ahmed Khan, S., The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible, 1862 - an introduction to the Bible and a commentary on Genesis 1-11 by a Muslim seeking to harmonise the Bible with the Qur'an and to defend it from Western critics. He gives Islamic parallels to Genesis, but avoids comment on such contentious passages as 9v20-24.

Brueggemann, W., Genesis, 1982. This is in the Interpretation series, which seeks to move beyond historical-critical understandings to "bring the text and its claims closer to the faith and ministry of the church" (pvii).

Calvin, J., Genesis, 1965 reprint - a classic reformed view.

Cassuto, U., A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, 1961 and 1964 - a modern Jewish commentary that takes account of critical

scholarship. The text is interpreted as it stands and as God-given Torah.

Westermann, C., Genesis 1-11, 1984, which can be relied upon to give all alternative readings of difficult texts, and to explore most of the questions raised by twentieth century commentators.

Zlotowitz, M. and Scherman, N., Bereishis vol.1, 1977 - a Jewish commentary, which introduces readers in English to the range of Torah scholarship - as its sub-title says, a new translation with a commentary anthologised from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources. Given the reliance of traditional Qur'anic commentators on Jewish sources (see 2.2.1 and C in 2.4.2), it is not surprising that Zlotowitz's approach is often similar to theirs.

B. For the understanding of the Qur'an:

The Qur'an will be read through a range of translations and *tafsīr*, chosen to represent the particular Muslims with whom I relate and to accommodate my language limitations. These will be treated as primary material. That is, rather than seeing the Qur'an as the text for study and the *tafsīr* as aiding that study, Qur'an and *tafsīr* together will be considered as the Text which represents the understandings of Muslims in Elswick¹.

The local Muslim communities include both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis: I have some competence in written Urdu but none in written Bengali. However, Pakistani and Bengali Islamic thinking has been subject to similar influences (see Schimmel 1980), so that a range of material of Pakistani origin can include most of the ideas encountered amongst my Bangladeshi friends. Particularly relevant is the Barelwi commentary, as the Islam practised by the local Sylheti community is closely parallel². Further, some of the Urdu commentaries are available in English translation.

Lewis (1993) identifies three major groupings amongst the Muslims of Bradford, all of which are influential in Elswick. They reflect religious groupings in Pakistan: two are associated with religious colleges and are strongly influenced by Sufism, and the third is a

largely lay movement with greatest appeal amongst the more educated young Muslims.

The Barelwi school is characterised by the recognition of *pīrs* (holy people) who instruct their followers and may offer spiritual prescriptions, and whose shrines may be visited after their death. It also has great reverence for Muhammad, and emphasises the practice of *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Its appeal is to the heart and to felt needs. In this study, it is represented by the Urdu translation of the Qur'an by its founder, Shah Muḥammed Aḥmed Rezā Khān (1856-1921) with commentary by Sayyed Muḥammed Na'īm Uddīn known as Al-Qur'ān al-Hakīm (undated) (henceforth Reza Khan). Its treatment of the stories is characterised by the inclusion of details from the *isrā'iliyyāt* (traditions of Jewish or Christian origin), and by the Sufi stress on the importance of *ʿilm* (knowledge).

The Deobandi school is a late nineteenth century revivalist movement, named after the town of Deoband where its main theological college is situated (See Metcalf, 1984). It is opposed to the Barelwi use of shrines and what is seen as an over-emphasis on the person of Muhammad. It is traditional in its interpretations of Islam, but stresses the need for personal sincerity and piety. It is missionary, but not political. It will be represented here by The Noble Qur'an, the English translation by Moḥammed Ashfaq Aḥmad of the Tafseer-e-USmani (1991) (henceforth Usmani). The Tafseer-e-USmani is based on the Urdu translation and commentary on the first three surahs by Sheikh-ul-Hind Maulana Maḥmood Hassan, the commentary having been completed by Shabbir Aḥmad Usmani. Usmani (1885-1949) was a student and a *khalīfah* (spiritual successor) of Sheikh-ul-Hind, a teacher at the Deoband college and an influential figure in the establishment of Pakistan.

The Jamā'at-i-Islāmi is a largely lay movement, appealing to educated people who seek to interpret Islam without the traditional *ʿulamā* and in a way that applies to every aspect of society. Although numerically smaller than the other two groups, it attracts more funding, produces more literature in English, and speaks more loudly

into British society. Its literature is becoming popular amongst young Muslims in Elswick. It is strongly political, and committed to the propagation of Islam amongst non-Muslims. It is represented here by Towards Understanding the Qur'an, the English translation by Zafar Ishaq Ansari of Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi's⁴ Tafhīm al-Qur'ān, published by The Islamic Foundation, Leicester (henceforth Maududi). To date, volumes 1-4 on surahs 1-16 are available. It is characterised by direct reliance on Qur'an and sunna, with little reference to traditional scholarship.

In addition, the following have been used:

Yusuf Ali, A., The Holy Qur'an, 3rd edition 1946⁴. Although, as Von Denffer (1985, p147) points out, "the translation in places is a little far from the text", this is one of the most widely accepted English translations, and is used for Qur'anic quotations unless otherwise indicated. The commentary is of the modern era, and makes little specific reference to classical commentators.

Azad, Abul Kalam, The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān⁵, 1968 - an attempt to reach back to the plain meaning of the Qur'an, first published in 1930. Azad was a leading figure in early twentieth century Indian Islam, who sought to apply Islam to modern times and wrote much of the tarjumān while in prison for political activities. The commentary is incomplete, finishing at Surah 23⁶.

Al-Tabarī, A.J.M.B.J., The Commentary on the Qur'an, 1987, henceforth "Tabari". This is one of the most influential classical Arabic commentaries: Unfortunately, the English translation only covers Surahs 1 and 2. However, all of Tabari's History has been translated by F. Rosenthal (1989), and the first two volumes contain stories that explain and fill the gaps in the Qur'anic prophet stories.

Various popular accounts of the stories of the prophets, including Qisās ul-Anbiyya' (Hijazi 1985) which is a not a commentary but a telling of the stories with the addition of information gained from hadith, *isrā'iliyyāt* and other popular sources. Ahmed (1986),

Nadwi (1979), Rukaini (1985), Sarwar (1984) and Von Denffer (1981) offer versions of the stories for children.

Al-Hujwiri, °Ali b. Uthman Al-Jullabi, Kashful Mahjub, 1953. This is a treatise on Sufism by an 11th century saint popularly known as Data Ganj Baksh. His shrine in Lahore is a popular place for pilgrimage. The Kashful Mahjub is not a *tafsīr*, but includes interesting references to the stories to be studied.

Of the South Asian writers, Maududi, Yusuf Ali and Azad are most familiar to western scholars, but the thinking of Reza Khan and Usmani is more influential at least amongst the first generation of Muslims in Elswick. For our stories, however, all these commentators show a remarkable convergence of interpretation despite their different approaches.

Except for Azad, there is also convergence in the use of verse-by-verse comment. Reza Khan, Usmani, Maududi and Yusuf Ali all do this by footnotes to translations. Tabari gives a verse or a phrase at a time and then comments on it. In contrast, Azad gives introductory comments to each section, a strategy which Yusuf Ali adds to his footnotes.

Verse-by-verse commentary is the traditional method: since few surahs were received as wholes, few have been treated as wholes despite the belief in their divine ordering. However, there is a tendency amongst more recent commentators - here represented by Maududi, Yusuf Ali and Azad - to see each surah as a unity, and to trace themes and connections through them. Mir (1993) has observed this as a trait amongst other twentieth century commentators of widely varying backgrounds, so it seems that this is a significant and probably permanent movement. I shall therefore use the insights suggested by seeing whole surahs as contexts, especially as I ask how the Qur'an uses its stories.

3.2.2 Community

The area of interest comprises the "Triangle", Jubilee Estate and Bentinck Estate in the Elswick Ward in Newcastle upon Tyne (see Maps 1-3). The "Triangle", where I live, and the Jubilee Estate are in St Paul's parish, and the Bentinck Estate in parish of the Venerable Bede. It is included in the study because of its high proportion of Bangladeshi Muslims.

The Bentinck Estate and the Jubilee Estate are council owned, the latter having been built on the site of demolished terraces in 1977. The "Triangle" comprises old terraced houses, some council property, some owner occupied, and some privately rented.

In 1985, there were Asians in all these areas. Since then, harassment has resulted in none remaining on the Jubilee Estate. Many Bangladeshis have moved into the Bentinck Estate, where they feel relatively secure. The "Triangle" has some elderly white residents and white families, numbers of Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, some students⁷, and a changing population of overseas students' families.

A. Statistics

Statistical information is limited by sources available. The main one is the 1991 census, but raw data is not available to the public. As well as the published material for Newcastle, however, the City Council has provided a variety of figures for Elswick Ward (See Figs 1-3).

The Church Urban Fund uses selected economic indicators from the 1991 census. These are available for St Paul's Parish⁸, and also by enumeration district (See Fig. 6). The Triangle coincides with districts CJFG16 and CJFG17, and the Jubilee estate and one street of the Bentinck Estate with CJFG21 and CJFG22. The rest of the Bentinck Estate is with the Lynnewood Tce area in CJFG15. Lynnewood Tce is very different in character, so that CJFG15 is not representative of the Bentinck Estate.



According to the 1991 census, Newcastle has a total ethnic minority of only 4%⁹. 20.1% of these live in Elswick, which has a 22.5% ethnic population. Most of these are in the area under consideration.

Fig. 1 shows which ethnic minorities live in Elswick. Comparing this to total Newcastle figures, Elswick has 56.7% of Newcastle Bangladeshis, but only 22.3% of Pakistanis and 8.7% of Indians. It also has 97.7% of the Bangladeshis living in the city challenge area. This is indicative of the poverty of much of the Bangladeshi community.

Fig. 2 shows age distributions. It indicates the large number of children and young people in the Muslim communities, where 32.9% of Pakistanis and 30.7% of Bangladeshis, compared to 16.7% of the total population, are aged under 10. In contrast, the white population has a high percentage of pensioners (15.9%), and of people in their twenties. The latter age group accounts for 43% of unemployed males and 47% of unemployed females.

Fig. 3 suggests how hard it will be for both Asian and white children to find employment as they grow up. In 1991, 42.8% of economically active males and 26.7% of economically active females aged under 25 were unemployed. The figures for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were 55.5% for males and 63.2% for females, and 26.3% for males and 64.3% for females respectively. The small numbers make the percentages less significant, but there are interesting features here.

Among males, Bangladeshis are still being absorbed into catering businesses, whilst Pakistani families with their own businesses have largely moved out of the area. One might speculate as to whether the latter community's businesses have already reached saturation, when this might happen to the newer Bangladeshi community, and how long both communities will take to diversify their economic activities.

Among females, few under 25's are listed as "economically active". Of Pakistanis, only 19 out of 45 (42%) are "active", and, of Bangladeshis, 14 out of 69 (20%): for white women, the proportion is 62%. This

reflects early marriage and child bearing and traditions of women remaining within the home in the Asian communities.

B. Deprivation

B.1 Elswick is part of the "City Challenge" area (See Map 1 and Fig. 4) identified by Newcastle City Council as in need of community regeneration in 1992. The Action Plan for the area (Newcastle upon Tyne City Council 1992) lists six major problem areas:

1. Education and youth: The area had double the proportion of single parent households of the rest of the city, less than 18% staying at school beyond 16, and over 50% of 16-24 year olds unemployed. Redewood, a local comprehensive schools, had a 25% truancy rate and only 2.1% of its pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade C or above¹⁰.
2. Unemployment: The overall rate of 25% was twice the city average. In some parts, the figure was over 50%.
3. Housing: There was a "spiral of property decline", with many boarded-up houses that were targets for arson and vandalism.
4. Poverty: 25% of household heads were either unemployed or on low wages, sick or disablement benefits. Over 60% of the children qualified for free school meals.
5. Health: Premature mortality, sickness and other health markers were all significantly higher than city averages.
6. Crime: Reported crime rates were higher than anywhere else in the Northumbria Police area. The fire brigade was also called out more frequently and subjected to more attacks than elsewhere.

B.2 The Church Urban Fund has its own deprivation indices. The original index used 1981 census figures, and took unemployment, overcrowding, no car, one parent families, lone pensioners, lack of basic amenities and ethnic minorities as indicators. St Paul's parish scored highest in Newcastle Diocese. The 1991 index omits one parent families, lone pensioners and ethnicity, substituting children in unsuitable accomodation and low earning households. The analysis is not yet complete, but the UPA Link Officer expects St Paul's to top

the list. Its "chi-score"¹¹ is 17.5, where the national mean is zero, and 8 indicates deprivation.

B.3 Despite extensive council development projects and a general increase in standards of living, the situation has much in common with that described by Davies (1971) and Taylor (1976) two decades ago. St Paul's parish corresponds roughly to the area that Taylor dubbed "Twilight Elswick", and perhaps still merits the name.

Statistics can, however, be misleading: despite the fact that 6% of those responding to the St Paul's School Parents' Survey¹² could see little positive in Elswick and 12% nothing, others found much to appreciate. 21% mentioned family and friends, 15% the school and 4% the church. They were more doubtful about positives for their children, 29% seeing none, and only 19% the childrens' friends. 22% were most concerned about children being influenced by "bad company", and 46% about the effects of crime on them.

For quality of life, these social indicators are more important, it seems, than economic indicators. It is ironical that the street that coincides with the enumeration district with the highest Church Urban Fund "chi-score"¹³ is also one of the most pleasant streets to live in. The neighbours are friendly, the children play happily outside, and it is currently experiencing less crime and harassment than some other streets.

C. Crime¹⁴

Newcastle City West (B3 sub division) is notoriously the division with the highest crime rates in the Northumbria police force, and often tops national lists. Of approximately 2,000 incidents per day dealt with by the whole force, about 120 (6%) come to B3.

All sectors of the community suffer, and the Police Race Relations Department's records suggest that ethnic minorities do not suffer more reported incidents per person than do the whites. However, there is much minor (and some major) harassment that is not reported, either

through fear of consequences, uncertainty about the system or disillusionment with the police and criminal justice system.

Racial incidents recorded by the police in the sub-division dropped slightly in 1992, although they continue to rise slightly in Newcastle as a whole and in all but one other division in the Northumbria area (see Fig. 7). The peak in 1991 at least in part coincides with the Gulf War and the unrest surrounding the civil disturbances (see 3.5.2).

Numbers of incidents in B3 are not large - 93 in 1991 and 67 in 1992, but they account for 62.7% and 47.5% respectively of the Newcastle totals and certainly under-represent the amount of race-related crime. Incidents are only recorded as racial if the victim asserts that they are so, and there can be series of incidents that are only recognised as racial after some time. In addition, some incidents are not reported - there seems little point in reporting regular verbal abuse from children and teenagers if nothing is done about it. There are also incidents which do not involve the police, being dealt with by schools or the Racial Harassment Support Group. The latter was set up as an inter-agency "Elswick Support Group" in 1988, with 3 full-time workers and an office at the Mill Lane Housing Office. It changed name and focus in 1992.

D. The Muslim communities

Qureshi's (1986) paper asserts that Muslims first settled in the Newcastle area 200 years ago. They came through working on ships, and formed a community in South Shields. In the West End, Muslims first came by the request of the British government to fill labour shortages in the early nineteen sixties and have since brought their families. Others have chosen to stay after completing tertiary education here¹⁵.

Most Newcastle Muslims come from families originating in Pakistan, but our area has a preponderance of Bangladeshis. Most of the latter are newer immigrants than are the Pakistanis, the men having often moved here from other parts of Britain, and having only recently brought

families to join them. There are still new families arriving in the area, both from other parts of Britain and from Bangladesh.

Local Pakistanis come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are from towns, and others from small villages. Some are highly educated in both Urdu and English, while others can scarcely read in any language. There are still numbers of women with little or no English, but most of their children were born in England and return to Pakistan only for short periods.

The Bangladeshis are nearly all from rural areas in Sylhet, and few have had more than very basic schooling. Many of the women came to Britain only on getting married, and have difficulty in speaking or reading English. There are also many children who were born in Bangladesh and others who have spent a year or more there on "holiday". This means that some have poor English, and find difficulty at school.

Both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis retain close contacts with their home countries. They usually send their dead back for burial, and many look to Pakistan or Bangladesh for marriage partners. In both communities, parents are concerned that children should grow up as good Muslims. Most are sent to Qur'an classes, and many to learn to read Urdu or Bengali. In all this, the Elswick Muslim communities reflect others in the U.K. and described in the various publications in Section B.3 of the Bibliography.

One concern of Muslim women is employment¹⁶. While some come from families that would not like them to work, others would be only too happy to see their low incomes augmented. Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services carried out a project on women's employment in 1989-91, part of which focussed on Bangladeshi women. The results give a profile of one aspect of this community (See Tyneside Womens Employment Project 1991).

Of 30 Bangladeshi women interviewed:

75% could speak some English, but only 10 felt competent.

17 could read and write in English a little, and 9 easily.

25% had husbands in work, mostly in low paid jobs.

75% had been educated in Bangladesh, one to degree level, the rest having limited schooling.

8 had experience of paid work. One had been a teacher in Bangladesh. The others had done part time creche or community work in England.

20 had been to English classes, nearly a third had done child care courses, and 20% dressmaking courses.

90% wanted paid work.

There is variation in the situations and attitudes of Muslim women in Elswick. As well as individual variations, there are national, class and generational differences. Summerfield's (1993) analysis of differences between Bangladeshi and Somali women in London suggests that differences in male occupations and in ease of divorce mean that Somali women learn English faster, are more assertive in their marriage situations and can more easily survive without male support.

Similarly, Elswick Pakistani women appear more able to relate to English culture and more assertive at home than Bangladeshi women. They also stay in education longer and are involved in a greater variety of economic activity (see Fig. 3). This may be partly because the Bangladeshis are newer immigrants, but there are also cultural differences and Pakistanis are more likely to seek spouses in the U.K. than are Bangladeshis.

While the Bangladeshis are fairly uniform in geographical and social origins, the Pakistanis have a variety of backgrounds. As more established immigrants, there is also more variation in parental education and occupation. Such variations are described in Mirza's (1989) study of young women in Bradford, and in Sheikh's (1991) novel which explores interactions between three women of different social and religious backgrounds.

Generational differences become marked as children educated in the U.K. have their own children. Again, this is currently more marked

in the Pakistani community, but is also slowly happening amongst Bangladeshis. An interesting study of the changing attitudes in three generations of Pakistani women in West Yorkshire can be found in Afshar 1989.

E. St Paul's Elswick Asian Project

St Paul's church is the only place of Christian worship in its parish. In 1983, it started a project with diocesan backing to enable Christian people to relate to Asian people. I was Project Leader from 1985-1992.

The aims of the Project are:

To see the church more fully display the true nature of the Body of Christ, who died and rose for those of every tribe, people and language, and with this in view:

1. To develop relationships with local people of Asian origin.
2. To develop an understanding of people of Asian origin and share it with other churches.
3. To share the Christian faith.

In seeking to further these aims, Christians from different churches (see map 3) have been involved in befriending and visiting Asian families, offering support and help either personally or through such agencies as the Ethnic Minorities Language Service, discussion with community and religious leaders and a variety of social activities. We are also members of the Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council. In all these contexts, opportunities for faith-sharing arise regularly.

In the churches, we have been available to provide resources and teaching, including a course to help Christians to look at Islam and to reflect on how they might respond to Muslims. There has also been a group that has met regularly for prayer and mutual support.

The main Biblical model on which ministry has been based is that of Jesus and the Samaritans - the despised ethnic minority of a related, but different, faith.

* Jesus experienced racism, but refused to react with hostility. His disciples' hostility provoked a statement about His purposes of

salvation (Lk 9v51-6). Therefore we seek to be aware of racism, to fight it, to teach Jesus' intention of saving people from all backgrounds, and to respond with love if we experience prejudice.

* Jesus appreciated what was good in the Samaritans - and sometimes they were better than the Jews (Luke 10v25-37, 17v12-18). Therefore we seek to affirm what is good in the Asian cultures and faiths, and sometimes see them as a challenge to ourselves and to our society.

* Jesus ministered to the Samaritan leper as part of a group in need (Luke 17v11-19). Therefore we seek to encourage churches to include Asians in their ministry to the rest of their communities.

* Jesus brought a whole Samaritan community the Good News about Himself - by breaking barriers and prejudices, and by spending time with one person who took the message back to her community (John 4v1-42). Therefore we seek to share the Gospel patiently as we relate with individuals and families. The pattern of Jesus' conversation encourages us in ministering to women, in accepting their friendship, understanding their families, and moving from questions of religion to questions of relationship with God. Most importantly, it encourages us to lavish time on people in ways that might seem wasteful.

In short, we have worked to an incarnational model, being part of the community, seeking to speak the Gospel as we live it and struggling to obey the commandment to "love our neighbours as ourselves".

Notes on 3.2

1. See 4.2.2 on Clooney's similar insistence on including commentaries in the Text.

2. S.W. Barton's (1986) account of the Bengali Muslims of Bradford accords with my observations of the Elswick community, and indicates this.

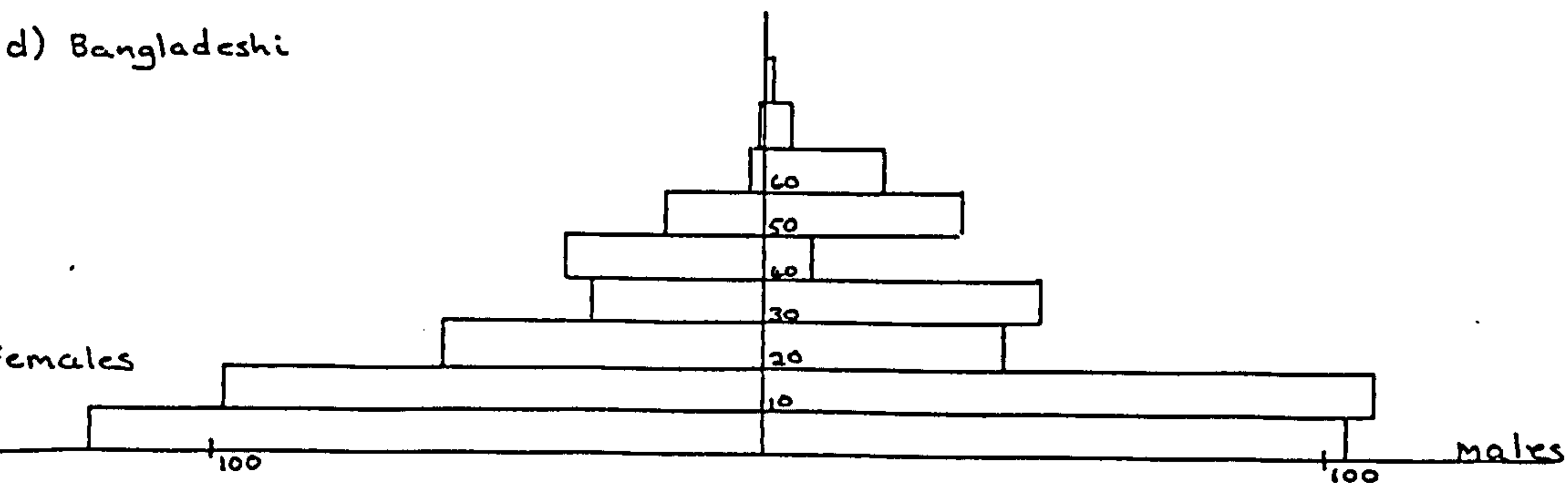
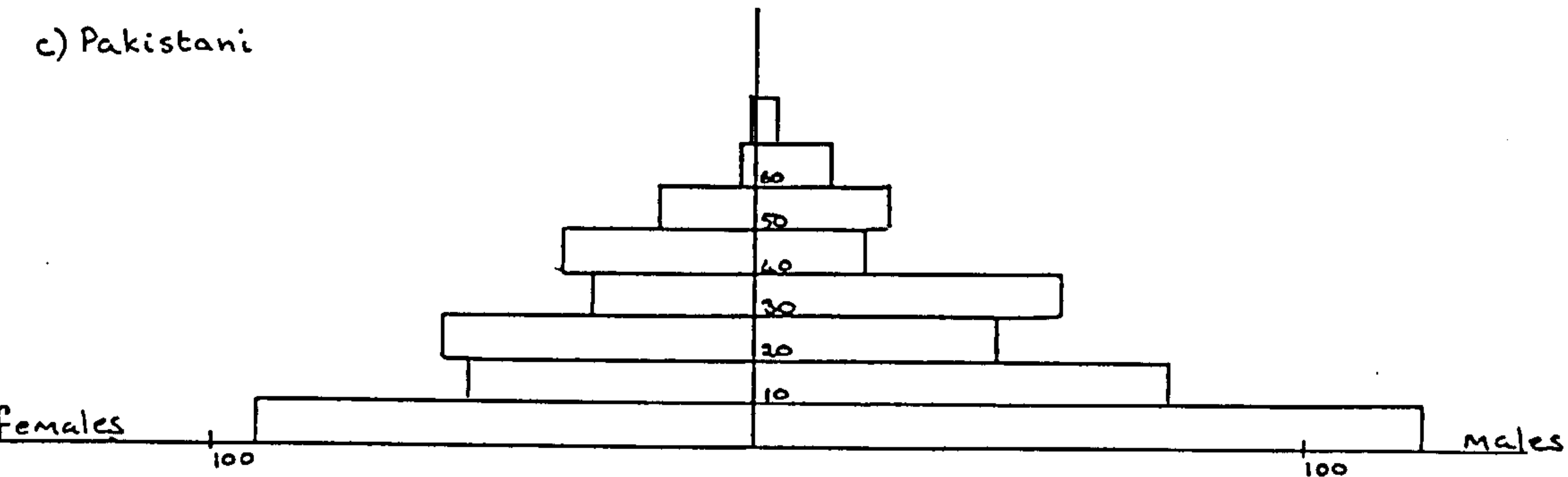
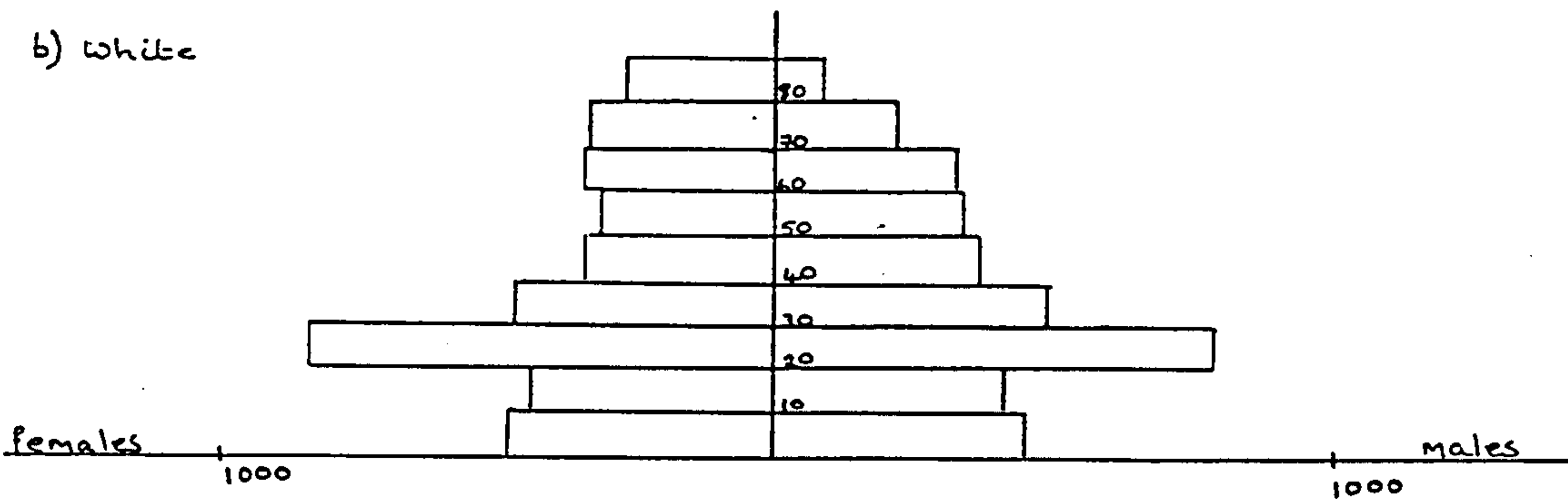
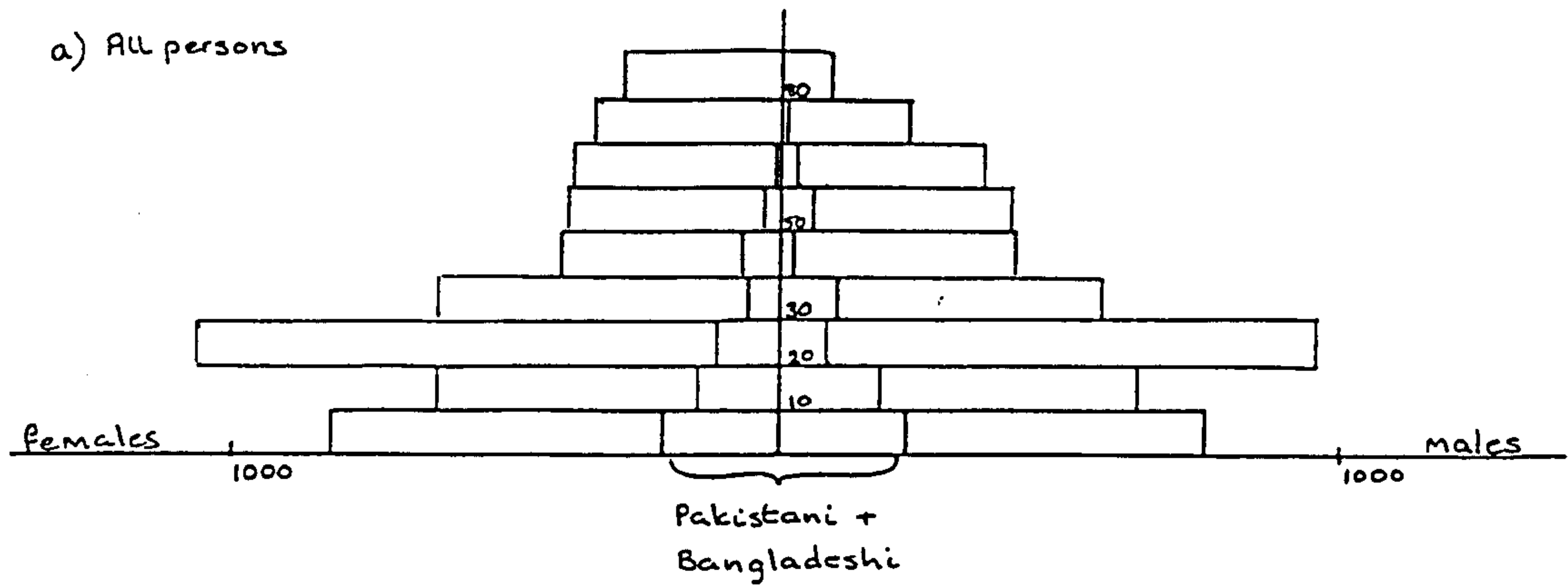
3. For discussions of Maududi and his work, see Adams 1988, Baljon 1961 p69, 77, 112, 117 and various papers in Ahmad and Ansari 1980.
4. See Jeffery 1940 for a discussion of this commentary.
5. See Douglas 1988 for an account of Azad's life and work and his chapter 3 and Baljon 1961 p7-11 & 23ff for discussions of the Tarjuman.
6. Unfortunately, my copy has the Adam story in Surah 2 missing.
7. Lets to undergraduates have decreased as the university has advised against living in such an area.
8. Unfortunately, one of the ten enumeration districts in St Paul's parish has been accidentally omitted from the C.U.F data.
9. The overall census figures are estimated to be under-reported by 3-4%.
10. 1992 showed a slight improvement, Redewood achieving 4% and Rutherford, which is attended by the majority of pupils in the area, 8%. In the summer term, Redewood reported a 21.3% absentee rate, and Rutherford 18.4%. (Racial Equality Sub-Committee minutes, 7.1.93). Trends can be seen in Fig 5.
11. This is a composite index using chi-squared significance testing to indicate how far local distributions differ from national distributions.
12. See St Paul's School Development Project 1994.
13. District CJFG16, which coincides with the street where I live!
14. Information from Northumbria Police Race Relations Department.
15. Similar patterns of immigration are observed by Shaw 1988 and Barton 1986. For an account of immigration of Bangladeshi men, see Adams 1987.
16. For an analysis of factors affecting paid work for Muslim women in Birmingham, see Brah 1993.

Fig. 1: Ethnic groups in Elswick Ward, 1991 Census Figures.

	Number	Percentage	Under 16
White	7265	77.46	1356
Black Caribbean	16	0.17	3
Black African	49	0.52	16
Black Other	24	0.26	16
Indian	190	2.03	62
Pakistani	651	6.94	302
Bangladeshi	733	7.82	355
Chinese	71	0.76	11
Other Asian	285	3.04	116
Other Ethnic	95	1.01	42
Total Ethnic	2114	22.54	923
Total Persons	9379	100.00	2279

(Figures from Newcastle City Council)

Fig. 2: Population pyramids for Elswick Ward.



(Figures from Newcastle City Council)

Fig. 3: Employment in Elswick Ward, 1991 Census Figures.

Economic Position	Ethnic Group			
	Total	White	Pakistani	Bengali
Total persons	7100	5909	349	378
Males 16 and over	3355	2737	180	196
Economically active	2190	1811	136	133
<i>of which aged under 25</i>	514	420	36	38
Employees - full time	1132	983	38	66
- part time	84	66	6	8
Self-employed	198	133	36	11
On government schemes	92	78	4	2
Unemployed	648	551	52	46
<i>of which aged under 25</i>	220	177	20	10
Females 16 and over	3745	3172	169	182
Economically active	1531	1390	43	32
<i>of which aged under 25</i>	483	431	19	14
Employees - full time	747	706	7	5
- part time	400	383	4	4
Self-employed	59	42	11	3
On government schemes	52	39	3	1
Unemployed	273	220	18	19
<i>of which aged under 25</i>	129	107	12	9

(Figures from Newcastle City Council)

Fig. 4: City Challenge Area.

	Challenge Area	City
Number of households	15,500	112,100
Usual residents	35,200	263,300
% of usual residents		
aged 0 to 4	8.4	5.9
aged 75 or over	6.9	7.5
Total employment	6,275	30,968
Total unemployment	3,859	15,828
% unemployment	22.9	11.8
Owner occupiers (%)	14.4	45.9
Local authority tenants (%)	55.6	39.7
Other tenants (%)	30.0	14.4
<u>Household characteristics (%)</u>		
One person households	39.1	31.2
Lone pensioners	20.7	19.0
One adult with children	6.8	3.7
Children in these households	22.8	14.4
Households more than 2 children	6.2	4.0
17 year olds staying at school	19.2	32.1
16-24 years olds unemployed	51.4	33.7
Persons in households where head born in New Commonwealth or Pakistan	8.0	2.9

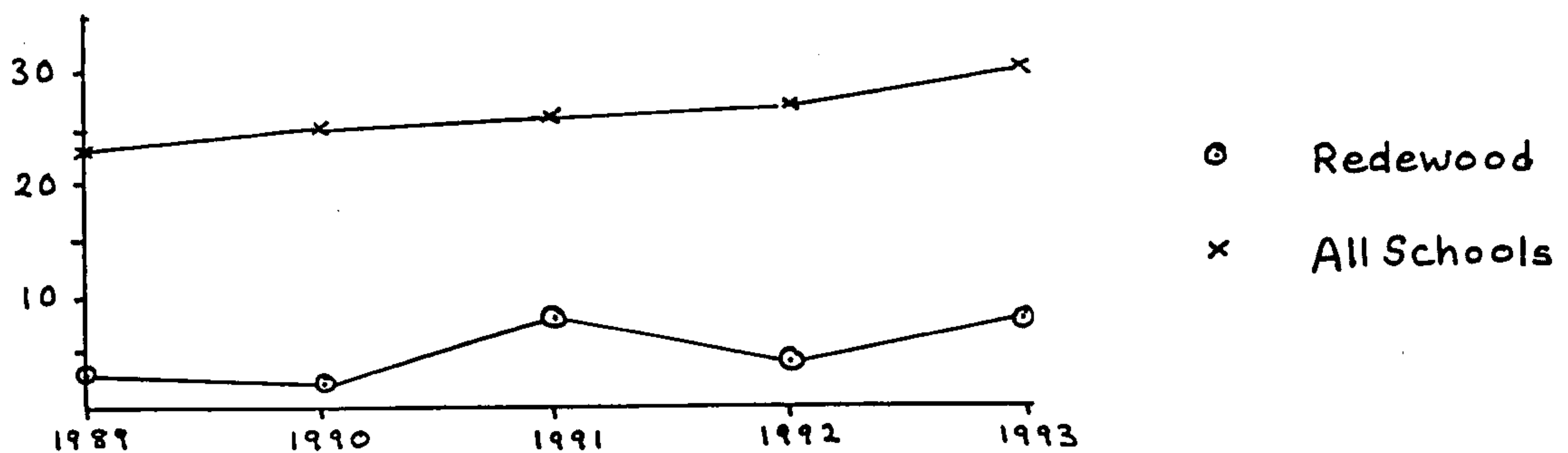
(Figures from Newcastle City Council's Action Plan, 1992)

Fig. 5: G. C. S. E. examination results.

a) Redewood School

% of pupils achieving 5+ A-G grades in 1993 = 46%
Average for Newcastle schools = 73.6%

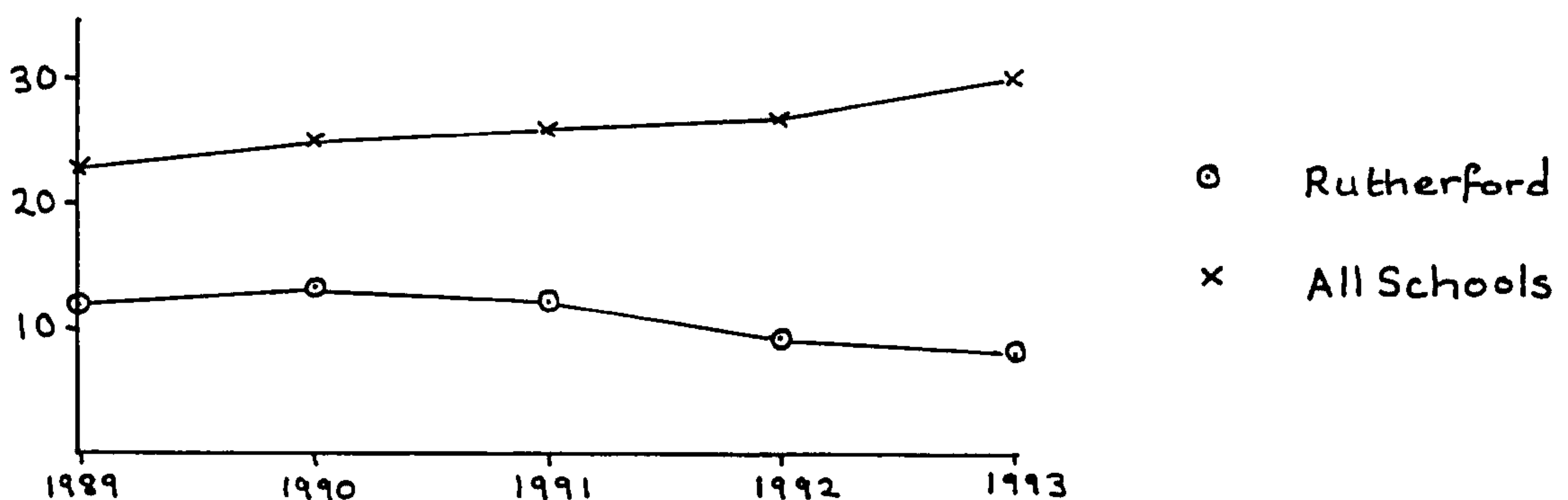
% of pupils achieving 5+ A-C grades, 1989-1993:



b) Rutherford School

% of pupils achieving 5+ A-G grades in 1993 = 57%
Average for Newcastle schools = 73.6%

% of pupils achieving 5+ A-C grades, 1989-1993



(From City of Newcastle upon Tyne,
Examination Performances in Newcastle Schools 1993)

Fig. 6: Church Urban Fund indicators.

	UE	OC	NC	CIF	CLE	LBA
Triangle	41.1	17.0	81.7	40.6	51.9	0.3
Jubilee Est + Mill Lane	61.2	5.0	96.0	0.7	75.9	0.5
Rest of Bentinck Est + Lynnewood Tce area	27.2	3.7	68.4	24.6	49.3	2.6
St Paul's Parish	47.2	6.3	86.5	17.1	64.9	1.4
National mean	9.5	2.1	32.4	9.2	18.7	1.1

Key: UE: % of economically active unemployed
OC: % of households overcrowded
NC: % of households with no car
CIF: % of children in unsuitable accommodation
CLE: % of children in low earning households
LBA: % of population lacking basic amenities

(Figures obtained from Newcastle Diocese UPA Link Officer)

Fig. 7: Reported Racial Incidents.

a) Forcewide.

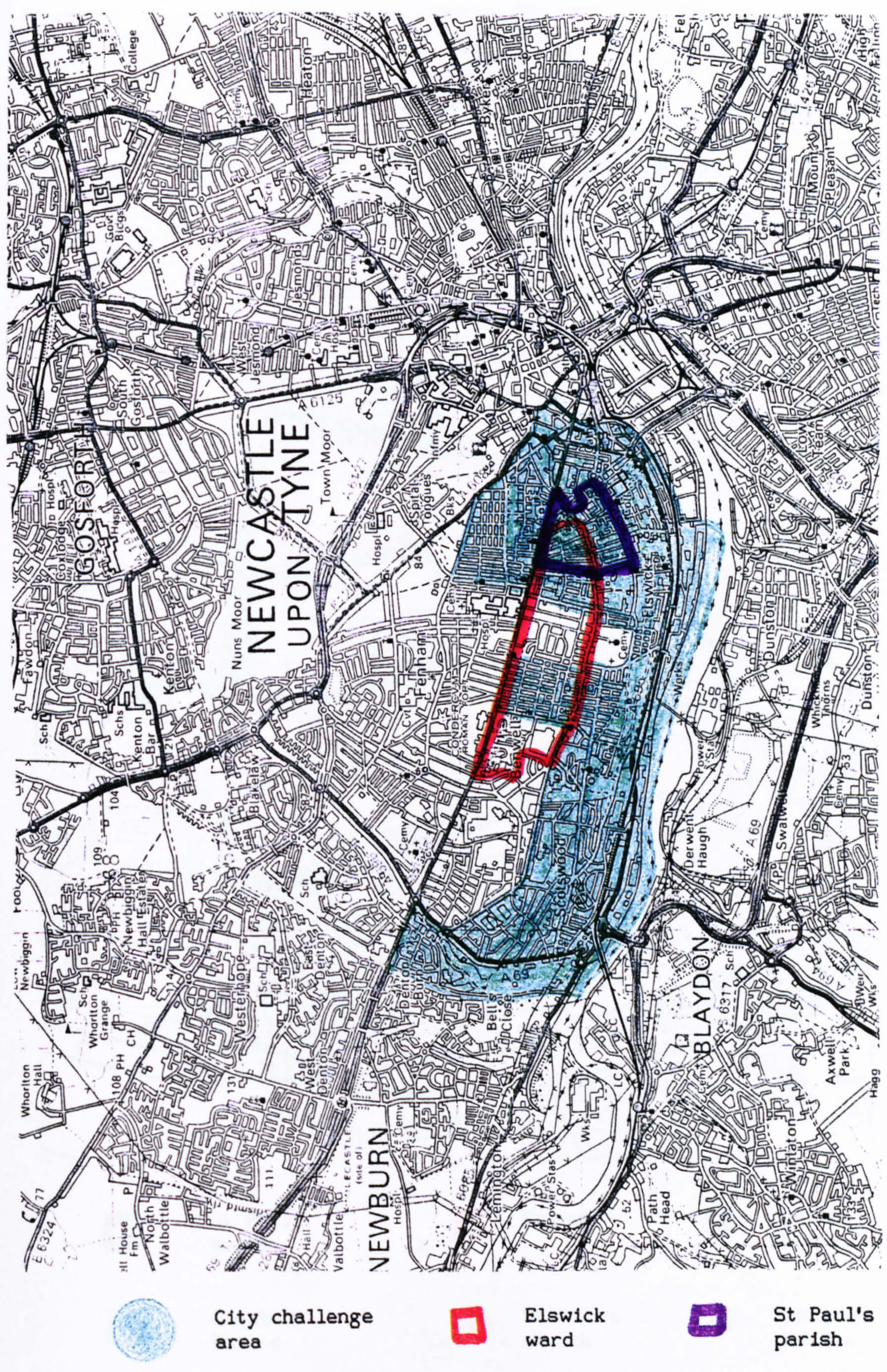
Division	1991	1992
A (Northumberland)	20	16
B (Newcastle)	149	141
C (North Tyneside)	46	37
D (Gateshead)	51	43
E (South Tyneside)	43	46
F (Sunderland)	67	66
Total	376	349

b) B3 Sub division (City West)

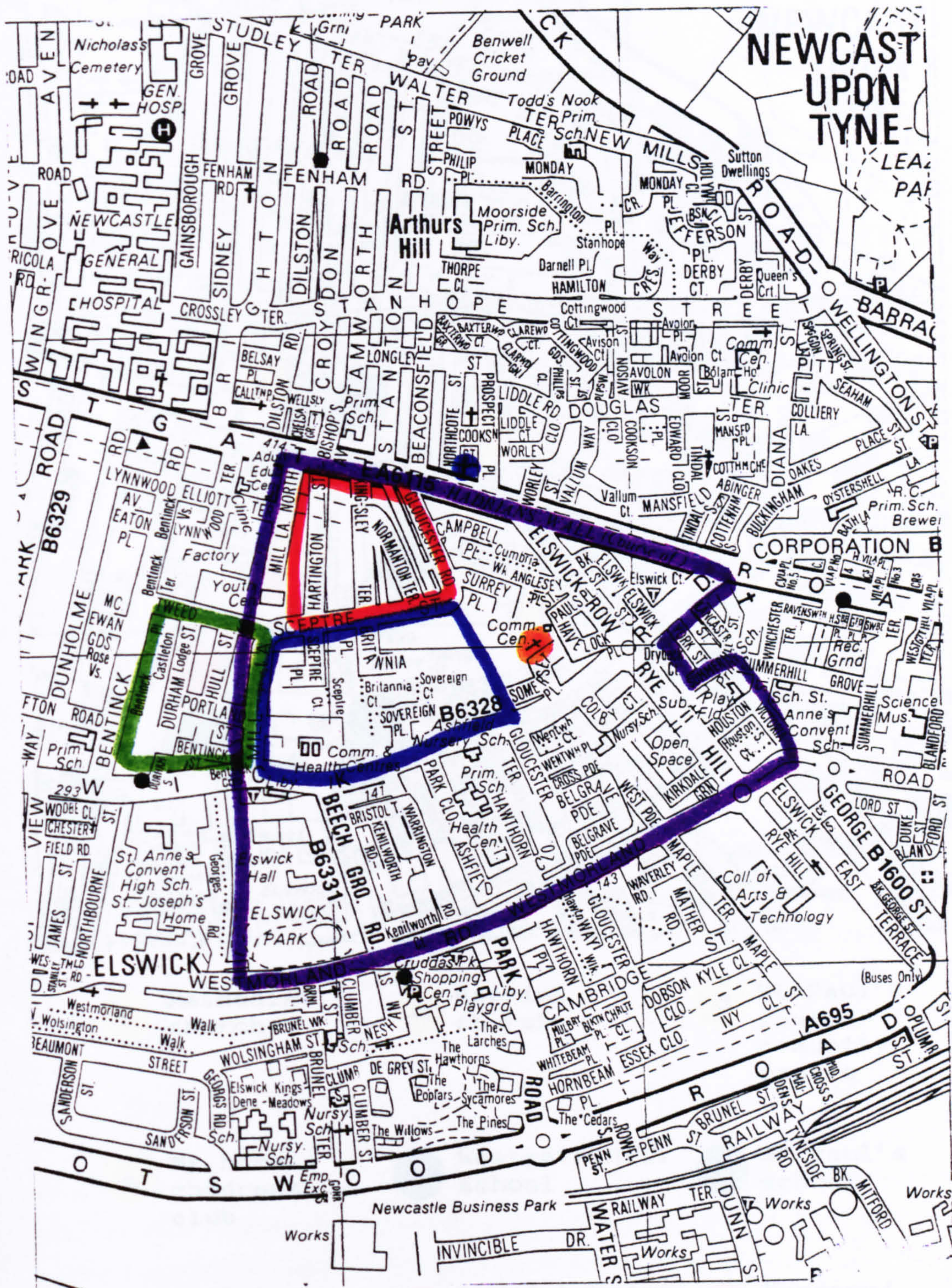
	1989	1990	1991	1992
January	2	6	2 (Gulf War)	6
February	4	3	15	8
March	2	15	6	8
April	3	11	5	3
May	4	10	5	7
June	7	2	8	6
July	4	4	7	5
August	10	5	10 (riots)	5 (murder)
September	9	2	10	3
October	4	5	13	6
November	5	6	6	6
December	4	2	6	4
TOTALS	58	71	93	67







(Figures from Northumbria Police Race Relations Unit)

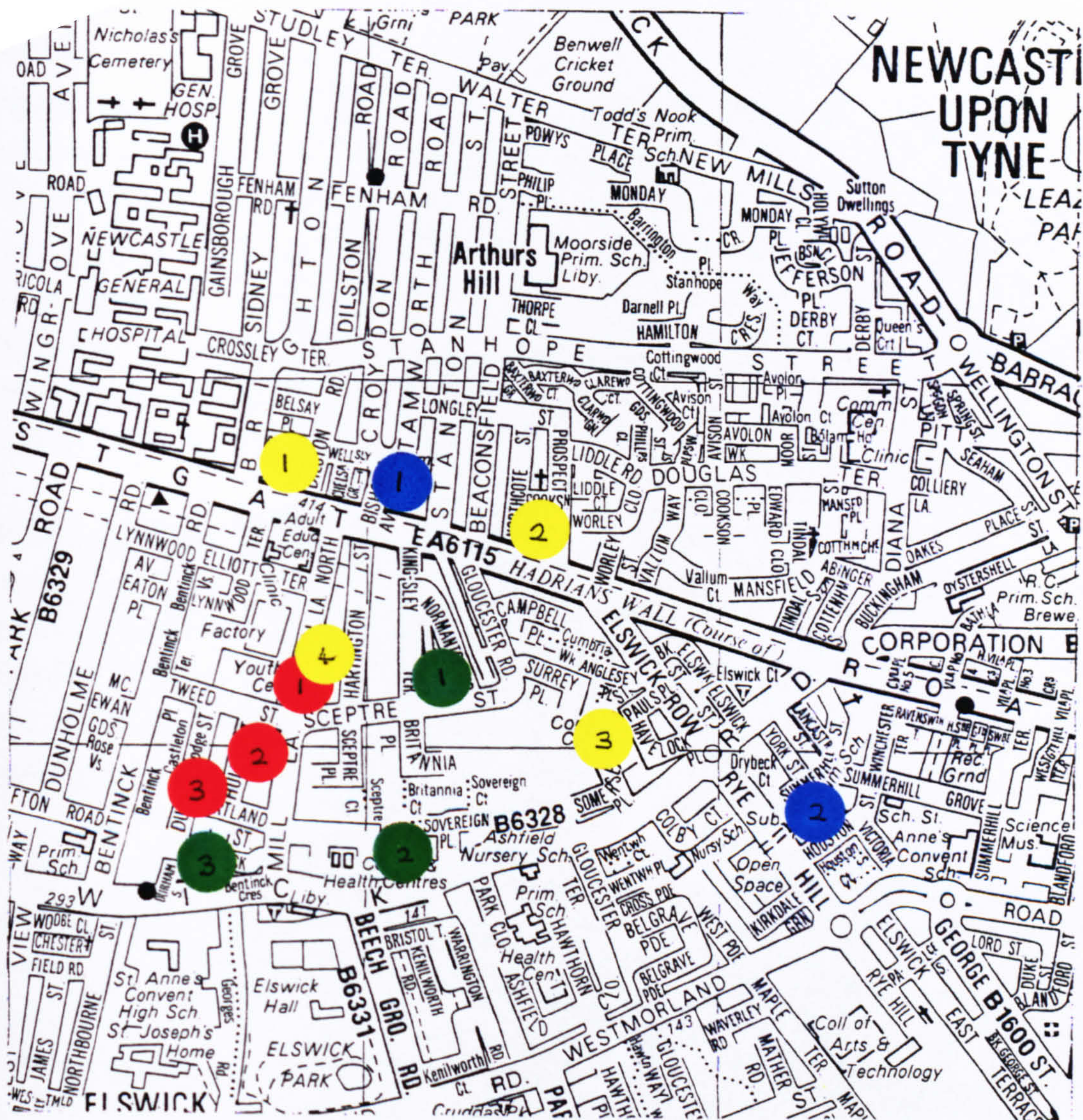
Map 1.



Map 2.



- | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|------------------|---|----------------|
|  | St Paul's parish |  | Triangle |  | Jubilee estate |
|  | Bentinck Estate |  | St Paul's church |  | Baptist church |



- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Methodist church | 2 Baptist church | 3 St Paul's church/ community centre |
| 4 My home/ childrens' club | 1 Westgate Hill school | 2 St Paul's school |
| 1 Mill Lane youth centre | 2 Local housing office | 3 Nursery/ English classes |
| 1 Bengali mosque | 2 Pakistani community centre/mosque | 3 Bengali community centre/mosque |

3.3 Method

The study has included five stages: reading the texts, comparing the texts, reflection in the context of the community, sharing the results and making responses. The first three establish the analogical system of 2.6 Fig 3 via the conversations of reader with texts and texts with each other. Stage four opens conversation of reader with community, and results in modification of the analogical system. Stage five allows insights from the system to transform the reader. These stages have not been sequential: they have often occurred simultaneously, and there have been frequent moves between them.

3.3.1 Reading the texts

Reading the texts involves listening to scholars who have struggled with grammar and vocabulary, dating and authorship, form and context, as well as to others who have approached the texts from different points of view. This has been done using the commentaries mentioned above.

The results of this stage are not recorded except where there are particular problems. Where there are difficulties in the texts, the range of possibilities offered is noted rather than arguing for a particular solution. In the case of the Qur'an, this is because the community is varied and all points of view are relevant. In the case of the Bible, it is partly because of my limited linguistic competence, and partly because I consider ambiguities as positive rather than problematic.

Where there are linguistic problems, the focus is on what is clear rather than on what is obscure. This can be more fruitful than seeking a particular interpretation¹. Ambiguities are understood as part of the narrative strategy of the texts (see Tate 1991 p152): double meanings and different possible readings can add to the understanding of the text rather than obscuring it. That is not to say that any reading is equally valid, but that where there are few reasons for preferring one reading over another it is sensible to seek to learn from them all².

Silences are also taken as deliberate (see Ting 1991). There are many questions raised by the tantalising brevity of the stories that are answered through Rabbinic comment and in the Qur'an. Taking the form of the stories in Genesis as canonical and therefore as intended, I treat the silences as both intentional and instructive.

For example, commentators ask why Cain's sacrifice was rejected and Abel's accepted. The stories surrounding both Biblical and Qur'anic texts seek to explain, but the fact is that neither Book gives the reasons. If the lack of detail is deliberate, it purposely provokes the reader to share Cain's sense of injustice, and to focus on his response to it. It also leaves open the question of what makes human beings acceptable to God. The silence is then not a hermeneutical enigma but a challenge to the reader.

The important thing is that silences and ambiguities leave the text open, provoking questions, offering challenges and inviting the reader into dialogue.

3.3.2 Comparing the texts

The choice of reading the Bible in the light of Christian commentary and the Qur'an in the light of Muslim commentary has led to the various problems explored in chapter 2. The method used in response has been that of conversation-recognition-analogy discussed in 2.4.2. The texts have been read both separately and together, and questions raised by the one addressed to the other in order to discern the difference-in-similarity of the analogical system.

The theological concern then leads to the question of how the Qur'an uses the Genesis stories. It will be seen that it often fills the gaps and answers the ambiguities of Genesis. The focus on reading the Bible in context then leads to the question, "What aspects of the Genesis text are highlighted by the comparison?" and the missionary motive adds, "What are the main issues between Christianity and Islam?"

This comprises the comparison of 3.4 below. It is presented with as little personal interpretation as possible, relying on what the stories say and on information from stage 1. The comparison has required numerous choices, but the attempt has been made not to present conclusions at this stage.

3.3.3 Reflection in the context of the community

This is the interaction between the compared stories and my own story, following the educational model of "teacher as researcher" (1.3.3). It is the building up of understanding of people, events and ministry in the light of the stories, and of understanding of the stories in the light of people, events and ministry. Some examples are presented in section 3.5.

The aim has been to recognise Elswick in Genesis and Genesis in Elswick. These early chapters of Genesis, although they are about beginnings, are also about all of humanity. They can therefore be read as being about the reader and her neighbours.

The Qur'anic stories are not interpreted as referring to all of humanity in the same way, but are presented as accounts of particular individuals. They are, however, paralleled with events in the life of Muhammad, and used as examples that illustrate universals. They therefore act as an alternative story of Elswick, representative of the thinking of my Muslim neighbours. Sometimes they tell the same story as Genesis, sometimes they add things that can be found elsewhere in the Bible, and sometimes they conflict with the Bible. In the latter case, both stories are compared with Elswick, to see where it can be recognised.

In this way, the stories have been read and compared during the course of a life which has interacted with the community of 3.2.2 above. Insights have been shared, discussed and prayed over through staff meetings with the local vicar, prayer meetings with local Christians, times of personal meditation and numerous occasions of preaching and teaching.

3.3.4 Sharing the results

This follows the "action research" model of 1.3.3. The results of the research are fed back into the system, and resulting changes in the system are observed. Feedback has been attempted in a number of ways, but changes are difficult to monitor since many have to do with heart-attitudes that cannot be seen by the researcher. Other changes are at a personal level, and cannot be recorded here without breaking confidence.

Ways of feed-back have included:

Personal conversations.

Preaching (see appendix II).

Writing (see for example Glaser 1993, and in Cooper 1993 pp21-8).

A variety of formal and informal teaching situations.

There has been no attempt to assess the effects of this feedback on the people communicated with, but some of their immediate responses have contributed to understandings of text and context. The results of the process are presented in the exposition of 3.6. Where considerations of confidentiality permit, the situations and responses that have stimulated reflection are also recorded.

3.3.5 Making a response

I have argued that theology is not valid unless it affects the life of the theologian, and of the Church. It has therefore been important to the research that I have not only invited other people to respond to what have learnt, but have also sought to respond to it myself in both my life and my ministry. This response is both an act of obedience and a way of testing out my conclusions.

My ongoing response has been part of the system. Section 3.7 will explore some of the responses required from the church.

Notes on 3.3

1. See for example the discussion of Gen 4v1 in C.3 of 3.4.4.
2. See for example the discussion of Gen 6v2 in A.4 of 3.4.2 and of the meanings of 'adam' in C of 3.4.4.

3.4 The stories compared

The stories that have clear parallels in the Qur'an are those of Adam, Cain and Abel and Noah. These will be treated first and at some depths, Adam meriting the most space. Eve will be treated separately, both because she is difficult to find in the Qur'anic stories and because she raises issues of particular interest for women. The other aspects of the Genesis text, which have brief, disputed or no Qur'anic parallel, will follow.

3.4.1 Adam

These stories lay the foundation for the study, since they deal with the creation, purpose and nature of human beings. Christians have given more attention to the first three chapters of Genesis than to all the rest of the book, and perhaps than to any other part of the Old Testament. Their interpretation is therefore fundamental to a Christian view of humanity, and comparison with Islamic parallels to comparative understanding.

However, the stories are limited as a source of comparative understanding of human nature. While all commentators agree that the Biblical Adam, whatever his historical referent, is archetypal human, the Qur'anic Adam is also considered a prophet. As such, he has qualities and privileges not shared by ordinary people. He receives messages from God, and this implies that he "is not to be judged by the same standards as greedy creatures" (Yusuf Ali, N472 on Surah 3:161).

This means that his disobedience may have little to say about the disobedience of others, and indeed most commentators are at pains to argue that he did not sin at all. However, he is considered archetypal human in some ways, and Muslims often use his story to argue with Christian views of human wickedness. Further, Eve is not a prophet so that their joint activities can be seen as human and not only prophetic.

We shall approach the Qur'anic story of Adam mainly from Surah 2, Baqarah, 30-39. There are other versions elsewhere, with different

contexts and emphases (7, A^crāf: 11-25; 15, Hijr: 26-44; 38, Šād: 71-85 and 20, Tā-Hā: 115-128). These will also be considered, but the emphasis will be on Baqarah. This is not the earliest version of the story, but gives the framework without which it is difficult to understand the others¹. More importantly, it focusses on Adam and his wife, while the others focus on Satan and his wiles.

A. Similarities

The Qur'anic story is recognisably a retelling of the Biblical version:

The creation of man from the ground (clay (7:12, 15:26, 38:71) or dust (Gen 2v7)), and his enlivening by the breath of God (Gen 2v7, 15:29, 38:72).

The giving of the physical order to man and of man to the physical order (Gen 1v29, 2v8-15, 9v3, 2:29-30).

The naming event (Gen 2v19-20, 2:31).

The placing of the man (and his wife) in the garden (Gen 2v8, 2:35, 7:19).

The prohibition against eating from a particular tree (Gen 2v16-17, 2:35, 7:19).

The temptation to disobey (Gen 3v1, 2:36, 7:20-22, 20:120).

The disobedience of both Adam and his wife.

The realisation of nakedness and covering with fig leaves.(Gen 3v6-7, 7:22, 20:121).

The call of God (Gen 3v9, 7:23).

The expulsion from the garden (Gen3v9, 23, 2:36, 7:24, 20:123).

The prediction of enmity (Gen 3v15ff, 2:36, 7:24, 20:123).

B. Differences.

B.1 Adam's relationship with God and creation

Both Bible and Qur'an define us as creatures: in the categorization of the universe into God and everything else, we are in the category of everything else. However, uniquely in the physical order, we also have a spiritual dimension, symbolised by the breathing of God into a body of earth². We therefore relate to God as well as to His creation.

Maududi tells us, 'The Qur'an defines precisely the true nature of man and his correct position in the universe' (N36). This nature is

described by the term khalīfah (2:30), which includes both a Godward and an earthward relationship. The Genesis account has no equivalent of this word, but describes the Godward relationship by speaking of man as 'in the image of God' (1v26-27) and the earthward relationship in terms of the 'adam and 'adamah: the man and the ground.

Khalīfah describes a status given by God for a role to be carried out on the earth. The term^{is} usually translated 'vicegerent', and carries a number of possible interpretations.

It literally means "successor", so that the question arises, 'To what?' Tabari asks, 'What resided on earth before mankind, so that man could have replaced them and been successors to them?' (p209) He gives various possibilities: that man replaced the jinn, who had previously been on the earth but had spread corruption there; that men were successors to one another; or that "God was putting someone in His place on earth to judge between His creatures according to His judgement". This latter is the most common contemporary interpretation.

Usmani sees the office of khalīfah as part of God's bounty, and links it with God's creating everything on earth for humanity in 2:29 "because a Viceroy on behalf of his Master is the controller and owner of all those things which are given by the Master." The title then denotes privilege.

It also denotes responsibility and purpose. This is variously described, but includes management, justice and equity (Reza Khan). In order to carry this out, the khalīfah is given superiority over the angels, in particular through his God-given knowledge of the names. Maududi (N17 on Surah 15) suggests that the capacities enabling vicegerency are a "reflection of the Divine attributes", but warns that this in no way implies a share in divinity. Divinity is "totally beyond the reach of all creatures", and privilege in no way implies that we can usurp the position of God:

Khalīfah or vicegerent is one who exercises authority delegated to him by his principal, and does so in the capacity of his deputy and agent. Hence, whatever authority he possesses is not

inherently his own, but is derived from, and circumscribed by, the limits set by his principal. A vicegerent is not entitled to do what he pleases, but is obliged to carry out the will of his master. If the vicegerent were either to begin thinking himself the real owner and to use the authority delegated to him in whatever manner he pleased, or if he were to acknowledge someone other than the real owner as his lord and master and to follow his directions, these would be deemed acts of infidelity and rebellion. (Maududi, N38 on Surah 2)

The commentators are at pains to retain the omnipotence of God in the face of the powers delegated to man. The problem is voiced by the angels, and explained by Maududi:

It was incomprehensible to them how a species of being invested with discretionary powers and authority could conform with the overall pattern of the universe, which is based on absolute and involuntary subservience to the Will of God. They thought that investing anyone with authority in any part of the universe would lead to mischief and disorder. (N39)

Man then, is under God and dependent on Him. His authority as *khalīfah* is real, but it is God's rather than his: he carries out his responsibilities on God's behalf and as his representative.

The phrase image of God (*tselem 'elōhîm*) (Gen 1v26-27) has been the subject of much discussion. Westermann comments, "the literature is limitless", and gives an extensive bibliography (p147-8)³. Wenham (p29-32) summarises interpretations in five categories:

- a) Image and likeness refer respectively to natural qualities common to all (e.g. reason, personality) and to supernatural graces given to the redeemed (e.g. ethical qualities). This distinction is not to be found in the Genesis text.
- b) The image refers to mental and spiritual capacities, such as free will, personality and reason, that humans share with God.
- c) It refers to a physical resemblance - or at least to upright stance. This seems unlikely in view of the Old Testament insistence that God has no body (e.g. Deut 4v15-16).
- d) The image makes humans God's representatives on earth. This is linked with the dominion given and the responsibility of caring for the garden.
- e) The image is the capacity to relate to God.

Westermann (p156-8) suggests that humanity - not just individuals - is created as a counterpart to God, that this should be interpreted in the context of the whole of Gen 1-2 and that undue emphasis on the single word *tselem* should be avoided. The *tselem* is then seen in Gen 1 as a creature that completes creation, one to whom God can address Himself, one who is given responsibility, and one who can receive blessing. It is also a social and differentiated creature, being made as male and female. Chapter 2 shows this in graphic detail.

Interpretation (d) comes close to the Qur'anic idea of *khalīfah*. However, 'image' and 'likeness' usually refer not to a representative but to a representation: while the Qur'an uses a word that can be translated 'vicegerent', Genesis does not. *Khalīfah* describes status and function, but *tselem* 'elōhīm describes nature with respect to God. That is, although the image of God includes the idea of dominion, it is primarily a description of what we are rather than of what we do.

This implies that human authority is given rather than derived - a consequence of our nature. Thus the authority given within the physical creation is not described in terms of stewardship - of looking after God's belongings on His behalf - but of a direct ruling over all living creatures (1v26), including the responsibility of filling and subduing the earth (1v28). As creatures, we derive our being from God and are dependent on Him, but the limited authority we have is ours.

Genesis describes relationships with the physical order in some detail. The outworking of authority over the animals is seen in the naming story (see B.3 below), but more striking in chapter two is the relationship between the man - 'adam - and the earth or ground - 'adamah⁴. Van der Wolde's semiotic analysis (1989 p75) points out how the repetitions of these similar sounding words indicate their importance and their relationship, and explores the theme of the earth's need of a tiller, and of the giving of man to supply this need (2v5, 3v23) (p82-3). The 'adamah's two-fold predicament in 2v5 - it needed God to water it, and the 'adam to till it - is met by the gift of water (v6) and the creation of the tiller (v7, 15). The dominion given

over the earth in chapter 1, with the implication that the earth is for the benefit of the 'adam, is balanced by the idea that the 'adam is made for the benefit of the earth in chapter 2.

B.2 The garden

In Genesis, the garden is on the earth. This is indicated by its location 'in the east', and by the rivers, two of which are clearly identified. There has been speculation as to where it was, whether it was a specific place, and what it stands for elsewhere in the Old Testament (see Westermann p208ff), but its terrestrial character is clear.

It is a beautiful place, well-watered and with abundant plant and animal life. In Ez 36v35 and Joel 2v3, it is a proverbial opposite to wilderness, and it is elsewhere described as 'the garden of God' (e.g. Ez 28v13). In this sense, it is a place of bliss; but it is not a place of leisure. We may be designed for pleasure (2v9), but not for idleness: even in Eden, there is work to be done (v15). Yet the work did not spoil the garden. It was only later, as a result of the fall, that it became onerous (3v7-19), and that controlling the animal world became a battle (3v14-15).

In contrast, Yusuf Ali asks, 'Was the Garden of Eden a place on this earth?' and replies, 'Obviously not!' (N50 on Surah 2) It was after the disobedience that Adam and Eve were placed on earth (2:36, 7:24-5): commentators agree that the garden was Paradise⁵. The limited duration of the time on earth in these verses is taken to mean that it is also the place to which believers will return after death. Further, the bliss of Paradise is described in such passages as 38:49ff as leisure: it is pictured in terms of all sensual delights, with no mention of work or responsibility. The job of *khalīfah* is to be carried out on earth, and not, apparently, in the garden.

B.3 The naming

In the Qur'an (2:31ff), the names are taught to Adam, whereas Genesis (2v19-20) gives Adam the responsibility for naming. The latter also places the event in the context of the man's need for a companion,

and specifies that it is the animals who are named: the Qur'an puts it in the context of relationship with the angels, and says nothing about which names were taught, thus provoking speculation amongst the commentators⁶. Thus both the purposes and the details of the stories are different.

The significance of the event in the Qur'an is, if judged by space given to interpretation, greater than that in Genesis. It shows the angels the superiority of Adam, for the reciting of the names is what demonstrates the rightness of the command to bow down before him. This can be taken to imply that the fundamental superiority of human beings is in the realm of knowledge - although there is wide variation of opinion as to what this knowledge is and how it was obtained.

Reza Khan says that Adam learnt from God by *ilhām* and includes natures, qualities, reasons and rules in the knowledge (*ʿilm*) that he was given. For him, *ʿilm* is of central importance in spiritual progress and the key human attribute. The angels' submission proves both that prophets, friends of God and *ʿulamā* are superior to angels, and that the angels recognise their ignorance and their limitations. According to Usmani, it also proves the superiority of knowledge over worship: the angels were both sinless and full of worship, but the vicegerency was not given to them. This is because worship is not an attribute of God. Knowledge is an attribute of God; Adam is given knowledge; and it is both necessary and fitting that the vicegerent should have the "quality" of the one he represents.

The Genesis naming story indicates Adam's relationship to the animals and not to the angels. It also suggests a greater, or perhaps a different, autonomy for the Biblical than for the Qur'anic Adam.

Von Rad (1972) points out the creative nature of language, as well as the fact that name-giving in the ancient Near East was 'primarily an exercise of sovereignty' (p81). Hence Adam's naming the animals indicates authority over them. The balance between Adam's part and God's is important. In that he names animals and is not taught the names, Adam is ruling in his own right and not only by delegation.

However, neither is he independent of God, in that God gives Him the job and then shares it by bringing the animals for naming.

Further, although Adam was naming what God had already made, we might say that making and naming together comprised the creative process. This is the pattern of chapter 1, where the naming of day and night, sky, land and sea is part of the creation narrative. There is a sense, then, in which Adam is God's partner rather than His vicegerent, in creating as well as in managing the world ⁷.

B.4 The prohibition

The prohibition is similar: the man and his wife are given freedom of the garden, but one tree is forbidden to them (Gen 2v16-17, 2:35, 7:19). In neither case is the reason for the ban given: Biblical and Qur'anic commentators agree that it is simply a matter of God's sovereign choice:

Nothing is explained . . . what counts is the fact of the prohibition, the authority of the one who speaks and the unqualified expectation of obedience. Brueggeman, p46.
. . . but rather to test how far they would follow the instructions of God and overcome the temptations of Satan . . . Maududi, N48.

Von Rad (1972, p79) even warns against seeking a purpose in the prohibition, saying that 'the snake was the first to open discussion about the command'.

The ban, then, is the same, but there are differences of detail: in the nature of the tree, in the penalty for disobedience, and in that, in the Surah 20 passage, the prohibition is not specified but implied in what is primarily a warning against Satan.

The tree in Genesis is 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil': the Qur'an gives no such information. Muslims and Christians agree that the prohibition was God's free choice, requiring free obedience to the Creator; but the tree has been a matter of much speculation.

Biblical commentators have asked whether knowledge of good and evil was obtained through the disobedience, so that evil is something that is done rather than an entity in itself, or whether certain types of

knowledge are in themselves evil. Qur'anic commentators have suggested that the fruit might have been grapes or wheat (Reza Khan) or lemon (Usmani), or have pointed out that there is no indication of its nature in either Qur'an or sunna and that it would anyway be useless to know (Tabari, p247).

What is clear is that, as Yusuf Ali points out, the tree in the Qur'an is 'not the tree of knowledge, for man was given in that perfect state fuller knowledge than he has now (12:31).' (N50) It seems that, while knowledge in the Qur'an is seen as the greatest dignity given by God, knowledge in Genesis is something dangerous or even forbidden.

The penalty for disobedience in Genesis is death (Gen 2v17), interpreted by most commentators as spiritual death seen in the separations resulting from the fall. In the Qur'an, Adam is told that the result of eating will be that, 'You shall run into harm and transgression' (7:19, 2:35) or be 'landed in misery' (20:117). The former is Yusuf Ali's interpretation of *fatakūnā min az-zālimīn* - 'You shall be among the *zālimīn*'. The root *zlm* has to do with wrong, harm, injustice and transgression, and is used in the word for darkness. Thus Pickthall translates, 'You will become wrongdoers'.

Tabari suggests *zulm* as meaning 'to put something elsewhere than in its place', which relates to Maududi's idea of the *zālim* as 'one who withholds these rights from their legitimate claimants'. (N49) In this case, disobedience is with^holding God's right to be obeyed and the self's right to escape perdition, as well as the rights of others which are violated through disobedience. Tabari explains *fatakūnā min az-zālimīn*:

Lest you should be among those who go beyond what has been permitted them and what is licit for them therein. p 249.

The picture is one of joining a company of evil-doers on the wrong way.

Over against this general agreement, Reza Khan's stress on the innocence of the prophets leads him to insist that *zulm* does not refer to sin (Urdu, *gunāh*), but to a mistake (*khatā*). Although God has

every right to use *ẓulm* of Adam, we do not - in fact, it is *kufr*, unbelief, to say that Adam - or any of the other prophets - commits *ẓulm* or *gunāh* (See also B.7 below).

B.5 The tempter

Although Christian interpreters (e.g. Calvin p139ff) have long identified the serpent with Satan, recent commentators point out that there is no justification for making this identity from the Genesis account by itself. For example, Brueggeman (p47) acknowledges possible significances of the serpent in other similar stories, and Von Rad (1972, p87) comments on later symbolic uses, but both insist that it is mistaken to read these interpretations into the Genesis passage.

The Qur'anic tempter is Satan. The serpent is never mentioned, and it is only the *ḥadīth* and the commentators that tell how Satan made use of it for his evil purposes⁸. The Qur'an has temptation coming from the spiritual realm: from Satan, the fallen jinn. Genesis has it coming from the earthly order: from a fellow-creature.

B.6 The temptations

In Genesis, the temptation from outside is to be 'like God, knowing good and evil' (3v4), and is based on questioning the consequences of disobedience. It is preceded by throwing doubt onto what God had said (v1), and followed by a temptation from inside - from the woman herself, as she saw that 'the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom' (v6). It is not until after the expulsion from the garden that we are told that the other tree, the tree of life, has fruit that brings life for ever.

In the Qur'an, living forever is the focus of temptation:

Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest you should become like angels or such beings and live forever (*min al-khālidīn*). (7:20)
Shall I lead you to the Tree of Eternity (*shajarat il-khuldi*) and to a kingdom that never decays. (20:120)

The latter, which is addressed to Adam only, also includes the temptation to power. The former, which is addressed to both man and wife, is in the context of unspecified whispered suggestions, and Satan's oath that he was a 'sincere adviser' (7:21).

There are some interesting contrasts here:

In the Qur'an, only the temptation from outside is recorded. There is no mention of a corresponding desire from within.

Knowledge is given to Adam in the Qur'anic account, whereas it is forbidden in Genesis⁹. Living forever is a temptation in the Qur'anic account and therefore not, apparently, something to be sought¹⁰, while in Genesis the tree of life is in the garden and therefore accessible.

Both accounts include temptation to power. In the Qur'an, this is to an unspecified kingdom, but in Genesis it is specific: 'You shall be like God'. It is a temptation not to listen to someone other than God, but to put oneself into the place of God¹¹.

B.7 The disobedience

The Biblical Adam and Eve were both aware of disobedience when they ate. The serpent did not lead Eve to believe that the prohibition was false or irrelevant: she ate in response to her own desires, when she saw the fruit as "good . . . pleasing . . . desirable" (Gen 3v6)¹². Although she claims to have been deceived (v13), God gives no more weight to this excuse than to Adam's suggestion that his disobedience was her fault. Certainly, both were sufficiently aware of wrongdoing to hide from God.

The Qur'an has no such hiding. The implication is that they did not realise that they were doing wrong when they ate. They were deceived (7:22), seduced (7:27, 20:121) and forgetful (20:115) rather than deliberately disobedient. This is particularly important to Reza Khan and Usmani, with their high view of prophets.

Reza Khan says, on 7:21 and 2:35, that Satan swore in God's name that he wanted the best for them. They thought that Satan must be telling the truth, because they could not imagine anyone swearing falsely in God's name. If Adam had realised he was doing wrong, he would never have eaten. Usmani agrees that Adam and his wife disobeyed through sheer innocence:

They might have forgotten that they were prohibited from eating it or might have considered it a lower type of prohibition not

liable to punishment, or might have balanced the censure on this action and the profit of its eating. N15 on A^craf

He goes on to discuss different levels of prohibition, and says that the reason Adam wanted to become immortal was "because he wanted to enjoy the ecstatic visions of God's Lights for ever". This he sees as a wholly commendable, if mistaken, motive, which proves that Adam did not sin, since sin is defined as a deliberate act against God.

Usmani, like Reza Khan on 2:35, is passionate in his insistence that Adam only made a mistake, and that his action does not negate the innocence of the prophets¹⁴:

If the readers will understand these brief notes, they will not err, nor will they be deceived and misled by such heretics as Maudoodi and Jews and Christians who have injured the Innocence of the Prophets by ascribing to them the commital of sins - intentional disobedience to God. idem.

B.8 After the disobedience

In both cases, there is awareness of nakedness, and the attempt to cover it with leaves. In both cases, they are ashamed and God calls to them. But the results of the shame, the call of God and the responses to the call are different.

The result of the shame in the Qur'an is limited to the covering of the body (7:22). Usmani commenting on this verse suggests that the shame was not because of sin but because of weakness. He quotes an earlier authority (Hazrat Shah Sahib) as saying that, before the disobedience, Adam and Eve had worn special clothes that did not need to be removed because there was "no need to ease nature, neither was there sexual appetite". When they ate, they lost the clothes and recognised their weaknesses.

In Genesis, the covering of the body is part of a more comprehensive hiding: they were hiding from each other as - and perhaps because - they were hiding from God (3v10). According to Adam, this was because they were afraid. He knew, it seems, that there might be severe consequences for his action, which is not surprising if he remembered the prohibition of 2v17. It was sin and not weakness that he was trying to hide.

The call of God in the Qur'an is a reminder of the prohibition, and of the warning against Satan (7:23). That in Genesis assumes that Adam and Eve remember, and functions as an accusation: it calls Adam out of his hiding, and then asks them to confess what they have done¹⁵.

The responses are not only different but opposite. The Biblical Adam and Eve, who need no reminder of their transgression, refuse to admit their guilt. Rather, they try to shift blame - Adam onto Eve, and Eve onto the serpent (3v12-13). Adam even implies that God is to blame, by pointing out that He had given the woman in the first place.

In contrast, the Qur'anic pair immediately admit their mistake and seek God's mercy (7:23). The passages in Surahs 2 and 20 add that God chose them, and that He taught them words, so that there is room for discussion on the exact order of events (see below on Adam's repentance). The immediate desire to turn (on realization of disobedience) is, however, assumed by both commentators and the tellers of children's stories¹⁶. Reza Khan on 2:37 says that Adam wept even more than David, who wept more than all the world's tears, when he realised his mistake. For three hundred years, he says, he would not look up because of his shame.

B.9 The expulsion from the garden

Qur'anic commentators stress that Adam and his wife were not expelled until after the acceptance of their repentance(2:37-38, 20:122-3), indicating that the expulsion is not a judgement but part of God's plan¹⁷. The announcements of expulsion say that it is of limited duration (7:24-5), and that response to divine guidance will determine the fate of future generations (2:38-9, 20:123-4). The two ideas are together taken to imply that those who accept the guidance will return to the garden after death.

A common feature of all the Qur'anic passages is that they went down from the garden at enmity with one another. This is generally taken as enmity between human beings and Satan, whether the pronouncement is in the plural (as in 2:36) or in the dual (as in 20:123). Usmani on 7:24 describes earth as the battlefield between

man and Satan. There is also the possibility of its referring to future enmity between Adam's offspring, but no suggestion of enmity between male and female.

The Biblical picture, with its placing of the guard at the entrance of the garden, begins the fulfilment of the dreadful pronouncements of 3v14-19. There is no hint of a return to the garden - the cherubim's flaming sword guards against this. It is also of interest that the expulsion in Genesis is entirely in the singular, dealing only with *ha-'adam* (see 3.4.4 on Eve).

C. Extras

C.1 The Qur'an adds details about angels and Satan

There is no mention of spiritual powers in the Biblical account. Human beings are described only in relationship with God and within the physical universe. As far as can be seen from these chapters, man is unique in his spiritual dimension, with the possible exception of the enigmatic serpent.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, gives more verses to dealings with spiritual powers than it does to the relationships with God of the rest of the created order that are the major concern of Genesis. Satan's activity is the focus of most of the accounts (see D below).

The story of the angels is in the Surah 2 passage¹⁸. They are pictured as God's 'faithful servants' (Maududi N37), who, as 2:30 suggests, spend their time in proclaiming and celebrating God's glory. Understandably, they seem to have thought that no further beings were necessary and asked why God should make a being that would cause trouble. Commentators are concerned to show that there was nothing wrong in the inquiry, but vary as to how they establish the angels' goodness. There is agreement that they were asking for information rather than rebelling. Yet God knew better: 'something over and above their work was required' (Maududi N41).

The story highlights the differences between the two orders of creation:

Humans are given choice. The angels 'have no independent wills of their own' (Yusuf Ali N47), whereas man has a degree of autonomous power to choose. This is implied by his position of authority, as well as by the statement that he would bring corruption to the earth¹⁹.

Humans are given knowledge. The names that Adam was taught (v31), whatever they were, demonstrated his superiority to the angels. Maududi (N43) says that each angel or type of angel was limited to a particular sphere of knowledge. Man's superiority lies in the width of his knowledge, rather than in its depth. Certainly, God gave man knowledge that the angels did not have. He later gave him words (v37) - already indicating man as the recipient of revelation, of which angels are only the agents.

It seems to be because of these differences that the angels are to bow before him²⁰ - although commentators warn against supposing that the angels were worshipping Adam. The prostration shows that they are to serve men, but only because they are instructed to do so (Maududi N45).

The obedience was to God, and the prostration towards Adam:
God honoured Adam by making the angels prostrate before him.

(Tabari, p243)

Satan is given much space in the Adam stories. It is he rather than Adam and Eve who falls. Although he is of the jinn rather than of the angels²¹, he is included in the command to the angels to bow before Adam²². He refused out of pride (2:34), thinking that being created from fire made him superior to Adam who was made from clay (7:12, 38:76).

As a result of this, he was counted as an unbeliever (*kāfir*) (2:34) and became rejected and accursed (*rajīm*) (15:34, 38:77). He was ejected from the garden, but given respite until the day of judgement (7:14-15, 15:36-8, 38:79-81). According to Yusuf Ali (N1973), this refers to his being allowed to continue to exercise his enmity with mankind.

This is the enmity understood in the plural of 2:36 and declared in Satan's pronouncements in 7:16-17, 15:39 and 38:82. Yet God's faithful servants are explicitly immune to his power (15:40-2, 38:83).

C.2 The Qur'an adds the idea of a covenant with Adam

This appears in Tā Hā:

We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant with Adam, but he forgot; and we found no firm resolve in him. 20:115

The word translated "taken the covenant" is not the noun *ʿahd* but its related verb, and is variously translated. Usmani has "we had urged Adam" and Reza Khan has the giving of a law or command, which he specifies as the command not to eat from the tree. This is the referent of the "covenant" in its immediate context.

Covenant is also mentioned immediately before the Adam story in Baqara:

Those who break God's covenant after it is ratified, and who sunder what God has ordered to be joined, and do mischief on earth: these cause loss (only) to themselves. 2:27

Tabari's notes suggest several levels of meaning of *ʿahd* here:

1. God's decree to His creatures, commanding obedience and given in Books and through Messengers.
2. The obligation imposed by God in the Torah that people should act upon it and accept Muhammad when he came.
3. The command to monotheism and a demonstration of God's Lordship.
4. The covenant with the descendants of Adam mentioned in 7:172-3.

Tabari says that this verse was addressed to the unbelieving Rabbis in Medina, as well as to other Children of Israel and hypocrites, but there is general agreement among the commentators that this section as a whole addresses the whole of mankind, while 40 onwards addresses the Jews in particular as it mentions the specific covenant with them.

There are two things to notice here. First, the covenant is essentially a commandment or set of commandments that the recipients agree to obey. 40 recognises that God also made promises as part of the

covenant with Israel: Reza Khan sees this as a general promise of reward for obedience, and Usmani as a promise of "the land of Syria" if they obey the *Tawrah* and believe in the coming of the Prophet. However, this lacks the dimensions of committed relationship and unconditional love of the Biblical covenants.

Maududi describes the *cahd* of Baqarah 27 as "injunctions or ordinances issued by a sovereign to his servants and subjects". He continues:

The *cahd* referred to signifies God's eternal command that all human beings are obliged to render their service, obedience and worship to Him alone.

This takes us to the second point - the universal covenant referred to by Maududi is that found in A^crāf 172-3:

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?" - They said: "Yea! We do testify!" (This) lest ye should say on the Day of Judgement: "Of this we were never mindful": Or lest ye should say: "Our fathers before us may have taken false gods, but we are their descendants after them: wilt Thou then destroy us because of the deeds of men who were futile?"

The word "covenant" is not in this passage, but the commentators are agreed that it implies a universal requirement that humankind should acknowledge their Lord, and that there can be no excuse for not doing so. Yusuf Ali speaks of an "implied covenant" (N1146).

There are various ways of explaining this, but the common idea is that human beings have a capacity for worship and obedience, and have had from this covenant with Adam an innate ability and even necessity to recognise the truth of the message of the prophets.

Usmani writes of the seed of faith or the light (*tajalli*) that God has put into every human heart, which means that our natural state is to believe in God. His translator adds a note that moves from the picture of Sovereign and subjects to Beloved and lovers:

The Beloved peeped into the window and asked the millions of lovers standing below after casting a Tallaji on them: "Am I not your Beloved?" They cried out: "Yes! Thou alone art our Beloved." "Now wait and labour for the second meeting" is

perhaps a sound ^hwhich echoes in the ears of the lovers of all times.

N163

There are, then, two covenants: the command to Adam not to eat, and the obligation on his descendants to acknowledge God. The first is mentioned in warning that we should not forget as Adam did, and the second to show that there is no excuse for disobeying God or rejecting His messengers.

C.3 The Qur'an adds Adam's repentance

There is no ending to the Adam story in Genesis. He and Eve went on to be the parents of the human race, but we do not know whether they repented, or even whether repentance was open to them as it seems to have been to Cain (Gen 4v7). It is only as we consider them as representative humans that we can find in the rest of the Bible the rest of the story.

In contrast, all three Qur'anic accounts of Adam's fall also tell of his restoration. Surah 20 recounts only God's part in this (v122), while Surah 7 records only Adam and Eve's words of repentance and gives no indication that God has relented except that the banishment to earth is said to be temporary. It is Surah 2 that puts the two parts together:

Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-returning, Most Merciful.2 :37.

There is a mutual turning - God is the Turner, who turns towards Adam when he turn towards Him. However, Adam could not turn of his own accord: he needed the help of God-given words.

Adam's desire to turn as soon as he understood his mistake is not in question (See B.8 above). Repentance is considered the obvious response to realisation of disobedience. How it happened leaves more room for discussion. The commentators give space to discussing the nature of repentance and what makes it acceptable, but in this context perhaps the more interesting question is as to the words (*kalimāt*) that Adam was taught and how he received them. An obvious suggestion is that they were the words recorded in 7:23, or some

other prayer for forgiveness. Other possibilities include conversations between God and Adam where Adam points out that God's mercy precedes His wrath, or asks for forgiveness on the grounds that God has foreordained the disobedience (Tabari, p262ff). Tabari tells us how it happened:

God presented Adam with words of repentance, and Adam received them from his Lord and took them penitently. Then God turned to him because of his saying these words. p262

Reza Khan on Baqarah tells a different story, on the authority of 'Ali. At the end of the three hundred years, Adam remembered that, when he first came into being, he saw the shahādah written on the Throne. Remembering the name of Muhammad there, he concluded that no one could be nearer to God, so prayed in the name of Muhammad and received immediate forgiveness. Several Arabic prayers for forgiveness are given in the Urdu commentary.

However Adam received the words, and whatever they were, this gives Adam the role of prophet, which he does not have in Genesis.

C.4 Genesis adds the 'curses'

Following the excuses from the man and the woman, God sentences man, woman and serpent. We have three terse descriptions of a world gone wrong, all of which could come under the Qur'anic notion "enmity"; but this is more far-reaching than the enmity envisaged by Qur'anic commentators.

Although the sentences are generally referred to as "curses", the word only occurs in two of them; and in neither case is it applied to human beings. It is the serpent and the ground that are cursed, perhaps, as suggested by Zlotowitz (p 132), because God had already blessed humanity. Despite the penalty threatened in 2v17, neither of the human beings gets a death sentence. Brueggeman (p50) is most eloquent on the subject:

The miracle is not that they are punished, but that they live. . . When the facts warrant death, God insists on life for His creatures.

The serpent has been given no opportunity to defend itself. It is sentenced for what it has done, and there is no suggestion of an excuse. As it was more "crafty" than the other animals, it is now more cursed. As it has pretended to be a friend to the woman, it will now be her enemy. As it prevailed in false friendship, it will now be crushed under her foot.

Interpretation depends on the significance of the serpent: as a representative of the animal kingdom, as human desire, as the evil tendency, as Satan, or just as itself²³. This gives a range from saying that the verses tell us why snakes are unclean (Lev 11v42) to the traditional Christian assertion that they are Messianic²⁴.

Wenham (p72-3) suggests several levels of meaning here, and that even as a member of the animal kingdom the serpent is an anti-God symbol. The sentence then implies disruption both within the animal kingdom and between humans and animals. It also points to an ongoing struggle with temptation and evil. The good news is that, despite all this, it is not the woman that is cursed but the snake. The woman has succumbed to its craftiness, but all humanity is not fated to succumb for ever. The snake will ultimately lose, as Satan will ultimately lose in the Qur'anic picture.

The woman is not given a reason for her sentence, nor is there any curse with it, perhaps because her fault has already been described and there is no need to underline it further. Her sentence focusses on her relationship with her husband, and on her function in procreation. Motherhood will be accompanied by suffering (*ʿitsabhôn*) and pain (*ʿetsebh*), and the male-female relationship will become one of dependence and domination. This will be further explored in 3.4.4.

The man is sentenced on two counts: he has listened to his wife, and he has eaten the fruit. Some commentators claim that the listening was the major fault. Zlotowitz (p131-2), for example, quotes suggestions that Adam was not aware that the fruit was from the forbidden tree, and Calvin (p172) sees Eve as a messenger of Satan who should not have been obeyed.

There is an interesting parallel between this sort of treatment and Qur'anic pictures of Adam and Eve listening to Satan rather than to God. It leads to the view that it is dangerous for men to listen to women, and even to regarding all women as potential messengers of the devil. It also suggests that men should have authority over their wives.

However, the text blames Adam for both eating and listening, and his excuse in verse 12 would seem to confess that he knew what he was eating. Further, there is nothing in chapter 2 about not listening to the woman, or about being in charge of her - only the command not to eat and the giving of the woman as helper. So it seems most likely that the mention of listening to the wife is to tell Adam that his excuse is not accepted²⁵.

As the sentence of the woman (*'ishshah*) spoils her relationship with the man (*'ish*), the sentence of the man (*'adam*) reverses his relationship with the ground (*'adamah*). The man was given to care for the ground: now it is cursed because of him. The ground produced plants for beauty and for food: it will now produce thorns and thistles. What remains is the work, but it will be full of suffering (*'itsabhôn*).

The repeated use of "eat" underlines the punishment. As he has eaten from the forbidden tree, he will continue to eat, but it will be through toil and thorns and sweat. Finally, as he came from the dust, so he will return to it: the death sentence is passed, although physical death is deferred to chapter 5.

D. How does the Qur'an use the stories?

D.1 Surah 2, Baqarah: 30-39

The passage begins *wa idh*, as does v34. This can be considered as implying reference to an already known story (see the treatment of Torrey 1933), or as putting the story into the context of the preceding material, which calls on people to obey God (21), and warns against rejecting Him and breaking His covenant (27). Here,

(God) has recalled His goodness, resolved doubts, plainly set forth the penalty of wrong-doing, given glad tidings, shown how

misunderstandings arise from a deliberate rejection of the light and breach of the covenant. Yusuf Ali, N46

In v28-9, the appeal turns to different grounds: God as creator and sustainer, and as giver of life and death²⁶. Maududi comments:

In His grasp lies man's life and death . . . He alone is the Lord who rules over the entire universe in which he lives. In view of this, the only attitude which can be deemed appropriate for man is one of service and subjection to God. N36

The Adam story, he says, presents the same idea, but on the grounds of man's position as vicegerent. This adds to the obligation of worship that of obeying God's instructions, and introduces a warning against Satan.

Usmani (N48 and 49) points out another aspect of v28-9 picked up by the Adam story - that of God's bounty in giving life and creating everything for human beings. The creation of Adam and his appointment as *khalīfah* are, he says, the bounty of God. He and Reza Khan also comment on human superiority, particularly in knowledge of the names. Tabari (p206) notes that the passage comes between 'How can you reject the faith in God, seeing that . . . ?' (v28) and 'Call to mind the favour which I bestowed upon you' (v40), and so agrees that Adam's creation is an account of God's blessings - of nature, of God's provision, of guidance and of forgiveness.

In summary, the function of the Adam story is to underline positively man's responsibilities of worship and obedience, and negatively the warnings against disobedience. It does this by pointing to God's power and benevolence in creation (thus calling to thanksgiving and worship), man's position as vicegerent (thus calling to obedience) and the wiles of Iblis (thus warning against failure in worship and obedience).

D.2 The other passages

These focus on Iblis, his fall, and his intentions and means of leading human beings astray. They therefore warn people not to listen to him. However, they also reassure by showing Iblis as under the control of God, and his activity as divinely known, permitted and

limited. Those who serve and worship only the true God will be protected from his wiles²⁷.

Surah 7, A^crāf: 11-25

This surah is, as Yusuf Ali observes, mainly about the opposition of good and evil, warning human beings to follow the good by accepting God's Messengers. The argument is largely presented through stories of peoples and prophets, the first being the Adam story.

A major difference from Surah 2 is the focus on Iblis. Usmani sees it as an account of the setting up of the battle between humans and Iblis that was necessary for all the attributes of God to be made manifest (N10 on v15). This is confirmed by the plural forms in v24, which indicate that the enmity on earth is not to be between Adam and his wife, but between them and Iblis. Further, the context is the warning of the "children of Adam" against the wiles of Iblis (v27), and the emphasis in the part of the story that focusses on the human beings is on how they were deceived.

Maududi takes the mention of nakedness in v22 and the references to clothing following the story as an opportunity for discussing modesty and proper dress (N13, 15, 16, 17, 18). He and Usmani note the context of the pre-Islamic practice of naked circumambulation of the Ka^cbah.

Surah 15, Hijr: 26-44.

According to Yusuf Ali, the theme of this surah is that God protects His truth. It tells of the destruction of peoples that have rejected this truth, and points to God's signs that confirm it. This is followed by the story of Iblis - Adam is not named, and there is no account of his temptation and fall. There is a focus on reasons for refusing to bow to Adam, and on God's control.

God says that Iblis is accursed (*rajīm*).

Iblis asks for respite, and is given it, but only until the Day of Judgement: Iblis's action is only by the permission of God.

Iblis declares his intent to mislead, but acknowledges that he will not be able to influence God's servants.

Maududi (N25) notes the contrast between Satan's intentions and those of Muhammad, who cares for people and leads them aright. Reza Khan notes the occasion of revelation of the previous verses (24-5):

To us are known those of you who hasten forward and those who lag behind. Assuredly it is thy Lord who will gather them together: for He is perfect in wisdom and knowledge. 24-25

This, he says, refers to a time when the Muslims at Medina were struggling to get to the mosque early to get a good place. The verse, he says, showed that God knew their intentions, and warned them that nothing was hidden. One of the thrusts of the Iblis story is then his wanting to be superior to Adam - pushing for the first place for the wrong reasons.

Surah 17, Banī Isrā'īl: 61-5.

Yusuf Ali says that this surah is about individual responsibility, and that the Adam story is about "the temptation of the individual human soul" (N2251). Usmani on the other hand notes the difference between the angels and Iblis: the angels obey God, while Iblis creates doubts and disputes divine commands. Both would agree that the passage is about Iblis as tempter. As in Surah 15, there is a focus on God's control. This is strengthened by the fact that it is not Iblis but God who describes how Iblis will act. There are also details about how Iblis will work.

Surah 18, Kahf: 50.

There is just one verse referring to Iblis's fall, and warning of the foolishness of taking his progeny as protectors. Usmani comments,

The main idea behind the repetition here is to warn mankind that heedlessness to the Hereafter and absorption in the transient worldly luxuries is the result of the Iblisic insinuations. N.65.

The verse is followed by a warning against "taking as helpers those who lead astray" which underlines its message.

Surah 20, Tā Hā: 115-24.

The immediate context is the reference to the covenant with Adam in v114, and to his forgetfulness (see C.2 above). Yusuf Ali also notes the previous stories, which tell of the arrogance of Pharaoh and of the people of Israel being led astray by the *Sāmiri*²⁸ who persuaded

them to make the golden calf. The thrust of the Adam story is then the arrogance of Iblis and the way that he led Adam astray. The point is underlined by the warning about turning away from God's message that follows the story.

Usmani, on the other hand, focusses on forgetfulness in his comments on v114 and 124. Of the disobedience, he simply says that Adam did not act in accordance with his high position, and then points out that God limited Iblis's influence and showed favour to Adam. Thus he retains the warning against forgetfulness, but also maintains Adam's prophetic dignity.

E. Aspects of the Genesis story highlighted by the comparison

E.1 The image of God

The words *khalīfah* and *tselem* that announce the creation of human beings have stimulated a discussion of the meaning of "image of God". Because the Qur'anic term describes function and status, the fact that the Genesis term describes nature in relation to God is highlighted. This will be used as a hermeneutic key in the exposition of 3.6.

E.2 Male-female relationships

The lack of role differentiation between Adam and his wife in the Qur'an draws attention to the different Genesis treatment. This is so marked as to merit extended discussion, and is explored in 3.4.4 below.

E.3 Spiritual powers

The Qur'anic inclusion of Iblis and the angels draws attention to the lack of mention of spiritual powers in Genesis. This is intensified by comparison with other ancient texts (see section 3.6.1)

E.4 The naming

The difference between the Qur'anic teaching of the names and the Genesis giving of the names draws attention to human abilities to create as well as to learn, and provokes thinking about human relationships to the natural world in, for example, scientific study. In the context of the *khalīfah*/image distinction, it also raises questions

about responsibility and autonomy and how these relate to being made "in the image of God".

E.5 The lack of repentance

For the Christian reader, the idea that the fall is followed by curse and expulsion is so familiar that no other ending to the story is considered. The Qur'anic contrast of a response of repentance draws attention to Adam and Eve's lack of it. It provokes the question as to whether acceptance of opportunity of repentance should be expected as a natural response to God, and underlines the extent of human fallenness envisaged in Genesis.

E.6 Adam as male or human?

That the Qur'anic Adam is a prophet provokes questions about the identity of the Genesis Adam. The dual and plural verbs describing the leaving of the garden provoke the observation that the Genesis expulsion is singular. This leads to an intensification of the question of when is Adam representative human, when representative male, and when the first individual. On the assumption that ambiguities are deliberate (see 3.3.1), these questions leave the text open in several places; but the singular expulsion implies human solidarity in exile.

F. Summary of issues

As the Adam stories are foundational, the issues they raise can be seen as underlying those to be found in the other stories. They will be raised here as questions, and explored further as the study proceeds.

F.1 Human nature

The comparison between the concepts of *khalīfah* and *tselem 'elōhīm* raises two questions.

(a) Are human beings defined primarily in terms of function and status or in terms of nature and relationship?

These definitions are not mutually exclusive: function and status must depend on nature, and nature and relationships have implications for

function. However, the words used by Genesis and the Qur'an suggest at least a difference of emphasis.

(b) What is the balance between divine omnipotence and human autonomy?

Both Christianity and Islam face the tension of reconciling divine control and human choice. It might appear that it is the emphasis that is different in the two systems, Islam leaning more towards predestination, and Christianity more towards free will. The comparison of the Adam stories suggests that underlying ideas are also different.

It is agreed that we have free choice only because God has made us like that. A God who is free can choose to do this - that was the lesson the Qur'anic angels had to learn. On the other hand, it is interesting that the Qur'an voices doubt about the wisdom of this, and that Maududi suggests that the angels feared it would upset the balance of the universe (N39 on Baqarah). This implies that the existence of an autonomous power other than God is problematic, and perhaps reflects the different ideas of human authority explored in B.1 above.

In the Qur'an, human authority is derived and we work as God's representative in His creation, but Biblical Adam is to be involved in the creative process as well as in tending what has been made. Further, there is no involvement of any supernatural being in the choices made in Genesis, nor is Adam permitted to lay responsibility for his actions outside himself. In contrast, the involvement of Satan in the Qur'an suggests that spiritual powers are partly responsible for human choices.

These observations suggest that Genesis sees human nature as having a creativity and autonomy beyond that envisaged in the Qur'an. It is not only, then, that Islam gives a greater emphasis to divine omnipotence, but that the Qur'anic God does not hand over causality to His *khalīfah* in the same way as does the Genesis God by making the 'adam in His own image. That Genesis presents fallen humanity as

powerful and godlike (3v22, 11v6) means that this autonomous causality has the potential of effectively challenging God, and that this potential has been realised. What is feared by the Qur'anic angels occurs in Genesis, while in the Qur'an the disobedience of Adam and Eve makes no difference to God's original plans.

F.2 The source of evil

Since we share the belief that God is One and omnipotent, Muslims and Christians share in the question of the source of evil. If the One God is good, and if He is not to be feared beyond bearing, we cannot think of Him as making or doing evil. As far as we can go is to say that He permits it, so that it must originate in the created orders - the earth, the animals, humankind and the spiritual powers.

As implied by its lack of mention of Satan (see B.3 above), Genesis lays the responsibility firmly onto human beings²⁹. Von Rad comments

The narrator is obviously anxious to shift the responsibility as little as possible from man. It is a question only of man and *his* guilt; therefore the narrator has carefully guarded against objectifying evil in any way, and therefore he has personified it as little as possible as a power from without. p87

Calvin agrees. He asks why Satan's revolution against God is not described and answers that the writer wants to describe *human* depravity:

. . . to teach us that Adam was not created to those multiple miseries under which all his posterity suffer, but that he fell into them by his own fault. p142

In Islam, on the other hand, we find a denial of the fall of man - instead, we have details of the fall of Satan (see C.1 above). There are interesting parallels here which are particularly evident in Surah 7, A'rāf:

Genesis has Eve tempted to elevate herself (3v5): the Qur'an has Satan claiming that he is better than Adam (7:12).

Genesis has Adam blaming God for giving him Eve (3v12): the Qur'an has Satan blaming God for misleading him (7:16).

Genesis has Adam expelled from Eden (3v23-4): the Qur'an has Satan expelled before Adam and Eve's disobedience (7:18).

Genesis has the serpent cursed (3v14) and the ground cursed

because of Adam (3v17), and later has Cain cursed (4v11): the Qur'an has Satan disgraced (*madh'ūm*) (7:18) and accursed (*rajīm*³¹) (15:34-5).

Although the Qur'an sees humans as rebellious and some as wicked (see 3.4.2-3), this puts the major source of evil outside the human sphere. Humanity no longer has to carry responsibility for all that is wrong in the world, and is not essentially wicked or rebellious. Rather, the impulse to wickedness comes from Satan, and what we have to do is to listen to God rather than him. We need not redemption, but reminder and warning.

F.3 What is sin?

The above raises the question of whether sin is due primarily to deception or to deliberate disobedience. It also raises the question of whether sin implies irreversible damage to relationship with God, or only temporarily faulty function. Further, are there categories of people who, as Reza Khan and Usmani insist (see B4 and B.7 above), are not sinful? Is Reza Khan's distinction between sin (*gunāh*) and mistake (*khatā'*) valid? Such questions will be further explored in 3.6.4.

Notes on 3.4.1

1. Hermansen 1988 suggests that the earliest references, in Surahs 18 and 20, assume knowledge of the rest of the story.
2. Maududi in N10 on Surah 7 discusses the implications of this over against what he understands to be a Darwinian view of humanity as entirely physical and temporal.
3. See also Jonsson 1988 for a survey of interpretations.
4. The Qur'an does not describe man's relationship with the earth in the Adam stories. However, 67:15 has, "It is He Who has made the earth manageable (*ḡalūl*) for you, so traverse ye through its tracts and enjoy of the sustenance which He furnishes". *ḡalūl* means docile, trained, tractable or gentle, and is now used of a female riding camel. Compare the post-fall "thorns and thistles" of Genesis 3v17.
5. *Jannah*, garden, is a frequent Qur'anic term for paradise.

6. For example, Yusuf Ali feels free to translate asma' as 'nature of things', and mentions that qualities and feelings that were unknown to the angels were put by God into the nature of man. Other possibilities are listed by Tabari, including the names of things from nations to creatures, the names of the angels and the names of Adam's offspring.

7. The idea of human beings working with God occurs more overtly in the New Testament (1 Cor 3v9, 2 Cor 6v1, Phil 2v12-13).

8. Elaborations include the serpent as a beautiful creature with four legs, like a Bactrian camel, with Satan coming out of its belly to tempt Eve. (Tabari, p251, Reza Khan).

9. These are not necessarily the same kinds of knowledge.

10. Yusuf Ali points out that they actually had permanent 'felicity' in the garden - the temptation was mere deceit (N2643).

11. The biblical pair do listen to the wrong people - Eve to the snake and Adam to Eve; but this is not the centre of their temptation.

12. Compare James 1v13-15.

14. Zlotowitz (p20) also attributes altruistic motives to Adam: that he thought that, by eating, he would make his task of obedience more difficult and therefore be able to glorify God more through his greater efforts. Unfortunately, he was wrong.

15. In the Qur'an it is addressed to Adam and his wife together, while in the Bible God speaks to them separately (see in 3.4.4 on Eve).

16. See Sarwar 1984 p149, Rukaini 1985, p15. ^{who}

17. There is apparent inconsistency in Usmani[^] (N58 on Baqarah) says that the order to live on earth was a punishment, but then (N61) that it was God's plan. Yusuf Ali also says that "God's decree is the result of man's action" (N53). However, all commentators agree that the going down was God's original plan and does not imply a fallen state for humanity.

18. There are parallels with Jewish suggestions that the plural of Gen 1v26 indicates a conversation with angels (See Zlotowitz p68). For a colourful refutation of this idea, see Calvin p92.

19. Yusuf Ali (N47) links this with emotion. The angels, he says, are without it, which is one reason for the limitation of their understanding of God, whose nature 'gives and asks for love'. Emotion, 'of which the highest flower is love' is what could 'lead (man) to the highest and drag him to the depths'. One might conjecture about the extent of Christian influence here - it is not mentioned by the other commentators.

20. Reza Khan goes to some length to show that man's superiority is to be seen in his knowledge.

21. He is made from fire rather than from air (7:12).

22. There are stories about how he reached the angelic position through assiduous worship. See Usmani N8 on Surah 7, and Hijazi 1985 p23ff.

23. See Westermann p237-8 and B.5 above.

24. It is interesting that Calvin (p170) rejects a direct Messianic interpretation and sees instead a more general prediction that human beings will conquer in their battle with Satan.

25. Calvin agrees here (p173). See also C.3 of 3.4.4 below.

26. Hermansen (1988) takes this as confirmation of her proposal that the Adam stories here and in A^crāf have major life vs death themes. However, this verse is clearly about physical life and death, and the stories about choosing the way to paradise or the way to hell. That

these alternatives are "life and death" is a Biblical and not a Qur'anic metaphor here.

27. Azad alone of our commentators pays little attention to Satan, except to point out (on the Surah 17 passage) that wrong human attitudes are satanic. He otherwise uses all the passages to illustrate the two paths that lead respectively to suffering and to success.

28. There are various suggestions as to who this *Sāmirī* might be. He appears first in 20:85. Yusuf Ali suggests that *Sāmirī* might be a personal name, or be related to "Samaria", or to the Hebrew *shomer* or guard. Usmani notes that his name is said to be Harun in the books of the Jews, and even that some say his name was Musa. This is not an identification with either the prophet Musa or his brother, but emphasises the subtlety of the deception.

29. The use of the serpent does not seem to imply rebellion in the animal world. Rather, commentators point out that listening to him heightens man's guilt, since he was neglecting his responsibility of ruling over the animals.

30. See also Westermann p239.

31. This is the word by which Satan is characterised, notably before every reading of the Qur'an, when the formula *a'ūdhu billāhi min ash-shaytān ir-rajīm* (I take refuge with God from the accursed Satan) is pronounced.

3.4.2 Cain and Abel

For both Muslim and Christian commentators, the Cain and Abel story gives an archetypal account of rivalry and murder. There is only one Qur'anic account of it, in Surah 5, Ma'idah:30-35, which facilitates the comparative process. Both versions give only an outline of narrative and focus instead on dialogue. The narratives are more closely parallel than others under consideration, but the dialogues differ as do contexts and interpretations.

A. Similarities

The characters are the same. All our commentators identify the two sons of Adam with the Biblical Cain and Abel, although they also give them their Arabic names, Qabil and Habil¹.

They offer sacrifices, and one^{is} accepted and the other rejected. The texts give minimal clues as to why this might have been. The Hebrew *sha'ah* suggests that God took notice of Abel's sacrifice, or looked on it with favour. The Arabic word *taqabbal* means "accept" or "receive", and is used of God's hearing and granting prayer (*du'ā'*).

Some Biblical commentators, notably the Jewish ones, see a difference between Abel's offering of the "best" and Cain's offering of "some" (see Zlotowitz and Cassuto on these verses), and conclude that intent is what matters. Tabari (History vol 1, p313) also relates this possibility. There is also a possible clue in God's exhortation to Cain to "improve", but it is not clear what this means. Abel's comment in the Qur'an (30) is that God accepts from the righteous, but commentators (e.g. Azad) suggest that his emphasis is on God's prerogative to accept or reject as He pleases. Beyond this, the texts leave the questions unanswered.

Cain becomes angry, and is counselled against doing wrong. The anger is directed not at God, who might logically be its object, but at Abel. In both cases, Cain is told that God will accept him (Genesis) or what he offers (Qur'an) if he improves (Genesis) or does right (Qur'an), and he is warned of the consequences of doing wrong.

Cain kills and buries his brother. Both accounts emphasise the horror of the fraternal killing by repeating the word "brother". Both are concerned with a sibling relationship that has gone wrong, and with the dynamic of jealousy and revenge. They show the interaction between the brothers' relationships with God and their relationship with each other.

Both accounts also note the ground's receiving of the murdered body. Genesis has the blood crying from the ground which appears to be associated with the curse from the ground, and the Qur'an has the story of the raven that shows Cain how to bury his brother.

Cain expresses regret. Neither Qur'anic nor Biblical commentators allow that this might have been true repentance². It seems to be only remorse provoked by a realisation of the consequences for himself.

Thus in both cases we have an account of the first death which is also the first murder, fuelled by the jealousy of one brother against another. The reason for the jealousy is the (unexplained) rejection of Cain's offering, and both accounts leave us with a sad and lost Cain.

B. Differences

B.1 The Qur'an does not name the brothers. The commentators say that the Biblical story is assumed. However, that Genesis includes the naming suggests that their personal identity is important, as is their relationship with their mother. This is underlined by the replacement of Abel by Seth in 4v25-6.

The main focus is on the name of Cain, with the enigmatic, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man". This presents Cain as the first human being that was born, and points out the divine as well as the human activity that brought him to birth. It also suggests a deliberate parallel with the events of chapters 2 and 3 (see B.3 of 3.4.4).

B.2 There are differences in the sacrifices and their acceptance or rejection. Genesis records what was sacrificed by each brother, but

on God's reason for accepting one and rejecting the other it gives only tantalising hints. Commentators fill the gaps according to their own concerns: Calvin (p194) writes of Abel's faith as God's gift, the Jewish commentators are interested in devotion, and Muslims focus on the *haram* marriage (see below) and Cain's refusal to accept God's sovereign decision.

There are other possibilities. Wenham (p104) lists five:

- 1) God prefers shepherds to cultivators.
- 2) Blood sacrifice is more acceptable than cereals.
- 3) God's motives are inscrutable: this is divine election.
- 4) Following Hebrews 11v4, the key is Abel's faith, seen only by God.
- 5) The quality of the gifts indicates a different approach to worship. This last is the most common suggestion.

While (1) is unlikely in view of the 2v15 command to till, the others are all possible. Together, they give the human and divine sides of acceptance: (2) and (3) concern God's sovereign choice, and (3) and (4) the attitudes of the sacrificers.

The Qur'an gives even less than Genesis, but suggests righteousness as the key factor. This is hinted in Abel's statement that sacrifices of the righteous would be accepted with its implied corollary that Cain's was not accepted because he was unrighteous, reflecting the Islamic idea that sacrifice is about devotion and thanksgiving and not about atonement³.

Details are amply made up by the commentators. Both Usmani and Reza Khan give the story of Cain's wanting the wife chosen for Abel. The latter goes into detail: Eve gave birth to sets of twins, and the brothers were to marry each other's twins. Cain's twin was more beautiful than Abel's, but Adam said that he could not marry such a close relative. It was decided that both brothers should offer sacrifice, and that Cain's twin would be given to the one whose sacrifice was accepted. The acceptance was known by fire from heaven consuming Abel's sacrifice. Thus Cain was in error in

opposing his father and in wanting a *haram* marriage as well as in being jealous of his brother.

Tabari (History vol 1 p308ff) relates versions of this story, and variations are also found in Rashi (Zlotowitz, p 142-3). Kashful Mahjub (p364) builds on this in the context of a discussion of marriage:

A woman was the cause of the first calamity that overtook Adam in Paradise, and also of the first quarrel that happened in this world (i.e. the quarrel of Cain and Abel). p364

Another interesting contrast here is what was accepted. Both Genesis and the Qur'an focus on the sacrificers rather than the sacrifices. However, in the Qur'an it is what comes from (min) the sacrificer that is accepted or rejected (5:30), whereas Genesis specifies the acceptance or rejection of both the person and his offering (Genesis 4v4-5). In fact, v6 suggests that the acceptance of the person is primary. Of course, the Qur'anic story shows that Cain was eventually rejected and implies that Abel gained paradise, but the acceptance or rejection of the person is not directly linked with the acceptance or rejection of the sacrifice.

B.3 The Qur'an does not record the details of the murder. It says only that Cain's *nafs* prompted him into the act. This is variously interpreted as "wicked self" (Usmani), "sinful soul" (Yusuf Ali) and "evil soul" (Maududi), while Reza Khan keeps *nafs* and Azad has "Cain made up his mind". This reflects a range of ideas about the nature of the *nafs*, from the Sufi understandings of a lower soul that must be fought⁴ to the more neutral idea of the *nafs* as the self.

The verse might, then, reflect the struggle against evil described in Genesis 4v7, but it might also suggest that Cain was intrinsically bad, which was why he ignored Abel's warning. Beyond that, the Qur'an is apparently not interested in Cain's reasons for killing his brother. The focus is on the innocent Abel and his response, and on the consequences of Cain's wickedness rather than its growth.

Genesis adds only that Cain spoke to his brother, and rose up against him in the field. These details have caused speculation, but tell us little of significance in themselves. The speaking of Cain to Abel may be seen as the occasion for the discussion given in the Qur'an. The Masoretic text gives no clue as to what was said, although many English translations follow the Septuagint and targums in adding, "Let us go out into the field". In fact, the Hebrew sentence is incomplete, being literally translated, "Cain said to his brother Abel".

The Jewish commentators echo the concerns of such Christian commentators as Westermann and Brueggeman when they put into Cain's mouth here questions about why his sacrifice was not accepted. He sees God as being unfair; and it is the perception of unfairness that provokes the (unfair) jealousy against Abel. This is consonant with the Qur'anic account, where Abel counters Cain's murderous threats by pointing out that it was God who had rejected him.

B.4 The remorse stories are different. The story of the raven is something of an enigma in the Qur'an. The commentators discuss what triggered Cain's remorse, and suggest that it was his ineptitude in comparison with the raven that showed him his predicament⁵.

The Jewish commentators speculate on Abel's burial, including variations on the raven story (Zlotowitz p149), but the Genesis account has only the blood crying out from the ground. In response to this, God calls Cain to account, and his first response is neither remorse nor repentance but denial. Like his parents, he tries to shift responsibility but does not succeed, and God pronounces judgement. It is on hearing the sentence that the remorse is expressed.

The surprise is that God listens to his complaint and ameliorates the punishment. Parallel to the Qur'an, we are not surprised that God listens to the cry of the innocent blood from the ground. In fact, we would expect Him to act as avenger. But here, God promises to avenge Cain as well as Abel⁶.

B.5 The descriptions of Cain's punishment are different. The Bible says nothing about his fate after death, while the Qur'an says nothing about his fate before death. Each story separately is incomplete. The Qur'an leaves us with the remorseful Cain, but we have no idea what happened to him during the rest of his life - only that he became one of the lost, which implies that he eventually went to hell. Usmani (N46) expands on this:

The worldly loss was that he lost his brother who might have become his right hand, and he himself died in madness. It is said in the Tradition that two sins are such whose (sic) punishment is given in this world before the Hereafter; (i) oppression (ii) cutting of womb relations. The punishment of the Hereafter is that he would share all the sins like tyranny, cutting of wombs, intentional murder and mischief committed by mankind on earth, because he is the founder of such sins and opened the door of such sins as given in the tradition.

The suggestion is that Cain (not Adam) is the father of these dreadful sins, and that he therefore carries some responsibility for them.

Turning to Genesis, there is much discussion about its account of the punishment, and particularly of the "mark" that God put on Cain. What is certain is that he did not receive a death sentence⁷, and that he was driven away from the ground and from his family.

Genesis then records some of the things that Cain did during the rest of his life, and lists his descendants⁸. This implies that God blessed him but, as with Adam and Eve, we are not told anything about his final destiny. We do not know whether he repented and was accepted by God. His descendants were, it is implied, destroyed in the flood.

B.6 Perhaps the most significant difference between the two stories is that they focus on different characters:

The Qur'an focuses on Abel. In Genesis, he says nothing at all: he is the silent victim. In contrast, the Qur'an has Abel speaking to his brother, refusing to do wrong in retaliation, submitting himself to God and warning him of the judgement that will follow his action.

Abel's speech in the Qur'an parallels God's in Genesis: it is he who says that right will be accepted, and who warns Cain of the

consequences of his actions. A difference is that God in Genesis exhorts Cain to choose the better way, whereas the emphasis of Abel in the Qur'an is on justifying God and himself. Azad shows this by interpolating "How am I to blame if your offering is not accepted?" at the end of v27.

Then comes the statement translated by Yusuf Ali "I intend to let thee draw on thyself my sin as well as thine." Two interpretations of this are given: that Cain should carry the sin he has committed against Abel, or that the victim's sins are forgiven while the murderer's are aggravated. Either way, Abel is completely vindicated⁹.

Abel's speech has some points in common with God's speech in Genesis, but comes at a different point in the narrative. There, the discussion apparently happens before the decision to kill has been made: in the Qur'an, Abel's speech happens after Cain has said that he will kill him. That could explain why the Qur'anic Abel focusses on response to hostility while God's exhortation in Genesis is to resist temptation.

From the text, it is not clear whether Abel's motivation is concern for Cain, or whether he merely wants to retain his own righteousness. Both Usmani (N44) and Yusuf Ali (N733) say that both are involved, and Rukaini's (1985 p20ff) children's version gives a moving account of Abel's sympathy for his brother as well as of Cain's struggles against Iblis' whisperings, although neither of these are in the text.

Genesis focuses on Cain and on God. Whilst Abel says nothing in Genesis, God says nothing in the Qur'an. The Qur'anic warnings are given by Abel, and God appears only as the outsider who chooses and rejects, and then judges. In Genesis, the action of God is explicit throughout, and God does most of the speaking. All of His speech is addressed to Cain, and the major part of the story is given to Cain's struggles, his sin and his fate. While the Qur'anic account gives the story of Cain and Abel, Genesis gives the story of Cain and God.

Two things stand out here. First, the Qur'an sees Abel as the messenger to Cain, whereas Genesis has God speaking to him directly.

Second, the Qur'an draws the reader into sympathy with Abel, whereas Genesis draws us into sympathy with Cain. The different foci indicate the different contexts and uses of the stories

C. What does the Qur'an do with the Genesis story?

The story starts with the command to "recite to them the truth of the two sons of Adam" (v30). "The truth" (*bi-l-ḥaqq*) implies, according to Yusuf Ali, that the Qur'an brings out the true meaning of the Genesis account. It can also be seen as supplying answers to some of the questions raised by Genesis. In particular, it fills the gap about the discussion between the brothers, and clarifies the difference between them. It details the dynamic of the relationship between the protagonists, and leaves the reader in no doubt as to what to think of them. Hence, for example, Azad (p292) sees the story as heralding a division between those following the alternative paths of truth and goodness and of tyranny.

The context is the breaking of the covenant by the Jews (v13-14) and the forgetfulness and blasphemy of the Christians (15, 19). The People of the Book are then told that God has sent them another messenger, and are reminded of the rebellion of the people of Moses. A theme throughout is that of reassurance for the Muslims in the face of opposition.

It is not surprising, then, that most of the commentators see Cain and Abel as a picture of Jews and Muslims, and more generally of Islam and its enemies. Reza Khan says that the story teaches the evil of jealousy, particularly to those who were jealous of Muhammad. Yusuf Ali says that Cain is a type of Muhammad's opponents - the People of the Book. Usmani expands on the wickedness and murderous intents of the Jews as a major thrust of the story:

Aforetime (the Jews) killed many Messengers and today also they are steeped in vicious conspiracies and wicked plots against the greatest Prophet of God out of envy and malignance. N 43

Maududi puts the passage in the context of a plot against Muhammad (N52). Some Jews invited the Prophet and his companions to dinner, intending to kill them. The plot was discovered, and they did not go.

In view of this, says Maududi, this part of the surah warns Muslims against following the ways of the People of the Book, but is also "to sensitize Jews and Christians to the errors they have committed and invite them to the true religion." (N30) He then sees the Arabs as the younger brother chosen by God while the older brother (the People of the Book) is rejected.

However, the context indicates that the story is also a background to legislation about murder, opposition to Muhammad and "mischief" (v36-7 and later criminal laws in the surah). The juxtaposition of these crimes is one of the reasons given for thinking that the story pictures opposition to Muhammad. Of our commentators, Usmani (N51-2) gives the most attention to legalities, detailing acts comprising "mischief" (impieties, profanities or propaganda against God and Islam and Muhammad; proposing prophets after Muhammad; keeping non-Muslims from accepting Islam or Muslims from practising it; spreading atheism or polytheism; apostasy and the preaching of apostasy)¹⁰.

In summary, the story has four thrusts:

- Legal - leading to laws about the punishment of murder etc..
- Warning - for those opposed to Muhammad and to Islam.
- Encouragement - for the innocent victims of ungodly opposition.
- Personal - warning against jealousy and taking the wrong path.

D. Aspects of the Genesis story highlighted by the comparison

D.1 Context

The lack of historical context in the Qur'an draws attention to the place of the story in the Genesis sequence. Following the accounts of creation blessings and Adam and Eve's fall, the story continues with the double account of God's blessing and the development of humanity, and of human sin and the degradation of humanity.

There is a parallel with chapters 2-3 (see Wenham p99):

The creation of Adam and Eve and the birth of Cain^{and} Abel are both beginnings of human life.

Chapter 3 is about disruption of relationships between man and wife, and chapter 4 about disruption of relationships between

siblings.

In both, the disruption follows disobedience to God.

Both give accounts of temptation.

In both, there is punishment by being sent out, as well as a sign of mercy (the clothes for Adam and Eve and the sign for Cain).

There is also a progression. The story moves from disobedience to God to violence against a human being, and from the eating of a fruit to the murder of a brother. While Eve succumbed to the serpent, Cain was impervious even to the entreaties of God Himself. There is an increase both of human sin and of divine intervention.

In the context of what follows, the Cain story gives the background to the first city, the first music and the first metal tools: that is, it leads into the development of culture. The continuation of the bearing of children and the development of skills can be seen as God's blessing despite Cain's sin. Calvin (p216) also discusses the possibility that it is Cain's restlessness and insecurity that provoke the various activities. This is further developed by Ellul (1970) as a foundation of his theory of the essential anti-God nature of cities.

Cain is also the forbear of the enigmatic Lamech. The referent of his song is obscure and has been the subject of much speculation. The Jewish commentators suggest various possibilities by which Lamech is seen as innocent¹¹, but the Christian commentators see him as part of the downward spiral of the fallen world. He is presented as the first polygamist, and his song as boastful and vengeful. That is, he was proud of having returned death for wounding, and that he was not only taking on God's responsibility for vengeance but also increasing it by a large factor.

Chapter 4 ends with the birth of Seth. Not only has God avenged the death of Abel: He has also given another son to replace the one that was lost.

D.2 Adam

The inclusion of the births of Cain and Abel in the Genesis story highlights its position in the genealogical system. It is part of the

thôl^edhôth section that started in 2v4 and continues to the end of chapter 4. This implies that it is part of the Adam story: in fact, Adam and Eve are present and active both at its beginning (4v1) and end (4v25).

We have already noted the parallels between Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. Seeing them as part of the same story is suggestive. In particular, the birth of the sons becomes part of the creation story, and the murder part of the fall story. It is not only that sin is intensified after the expulsion from Eden, but that rivalry, violence, exile and thirst for vengeance are as much part of the human predicament as are disrupted relationships with animals and ground and between men and women. The Cain and Abel story is as much a second aspect of the fall as it is an intensified result of it.

D.3 Cain

If Cain is as much an archetypal sinner as Adam, the focus on him implies God's concern for sinners. Abel is simply the victim, and what he thinks and says is not relevant. We are, I suggest, invited to identify with Cain and to see our jealousy reflected in his. We are then invited to see God's concern that we overcome it and to hear His call. The "if you improve" gives us hope as much as it should have to Cain.

A Muslim friend, on reading the Genesis version of the story, commented on her unease at finding herself in sympathy with Cain. She should not, she felt, have felt sorry for the wicked one but for the innocent victim. Genesis subverts our simplistic understandings of good and evil, and our tendencies to divide the world into those we approve and those we disapprove. Perhaps the key question here is, "With whom do we identify - the "good" Abel or the "bad" Cain?"

Jesus is the master subverter in this area. Magonet (1991, p121) suggests that the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is a re-working of Cain and Abel¹². It is told to people who would identify themselves with "good" Abel, and who criticised Jesus for socialising with "bad" Cains (v1-2). The story challenges this division. The

younger son - and therefore the Abel figure - is the one who went wrong. He is received according to the father's grace when he returns with the acceptable sacrifice of repentance and faith. The older, Cain, figure is the one who appears to be "good". He it is who feels unaccepted and becomes jealous of his brother. But the story is incomplete: it is left to the hearers to determine how they will deal with their own jealousy, and how they will respond to the father's tender exhortation in verse 31-2.

E. Summary of issues

E.1 Abel is not included in lists of Qur'anic prophets, perhaps because the words he addresses to Cain are not said to have been given to him by God. The story nevertheless raises the question of how God speaks, and what might be the significance of the Qur'anic Abel taking something of the Genesis role of God. This leads on to the further question of possible Qur'anic parallels to the conversation between Cain and God, and the nature of the many warnings and exhortations to the unbelievers in the Qur'an. Is there a difference in God's concern for the wicked in the two Books?

E.2 What is an acceptable sacrifice? What might be its purpose? Although the offering of sacrifices is a common occurrence in the Bible, it is rare in the Qur'an. Abraham's sacrifice of his son (37, Saffat, 99-111) is commemorated during the Hajj, as explained in 22, Hajj, 33ff. 34 explains its significance:

To every people did we appoint rites (of sacrifice), that they might celebrate the name of God over the sustenance He gave them.

As Yusuf Ali points out, this implies that the purpose of sacrifice is not propitiation but thanksgiving. 36 repeats the point, and 27 indicates that the most important aspect of the sacrifice is the piety of the sacrificer:

It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches God: it is your piety that reaches Him.

One might also ask why the brothers sacrificed at all. Some commentators on Genesis (e.g. Calvin p192, Zlotowitz p144) maintain that God had shown them the pattern of sacrificial worship. The Qur'an gives no clue at all.

E.3 What is the fundamental difference between Cain and Abel? Both stories give rise to questions about the dynamics of jealousy and internal struggles with sin, but the one contrasts Cain with Abel and the other focusses on Cain and gives little clue about the nature of Abel. Do the two then stand for two different kinds of human beings, or for two choices for all of us? Or are we all, to at least some extent, Cain?

E.4 How might Christians and Jews respond to the accusations implicit in the Qur'anic story and made explicit by the commentators?

This is explored in 3.7.4.

Notes on 3.4.2

1. Tabari, History vol 1, p314ff, notes contrary opinions, but himself prefers the Cain and Abel interpretation.
2. Some of the Jewish commentators differ here. See Zlotowitz's extended discussion, p157-8.
3. See E.2 below and Sarwar 1984 p184-5 on the *ʿad* sacrifice.
4. For a range of Sufi formulations see *Kashful Mahjub* p196-210. Compare the Jewish concept of the "evil tendency" and Paul's concept of "flesh" in Romans.
5. See also expansions of this in Tabari History vol 1, p311
6. Some commentators see the promise to avenge Cain as ensuring the punishment rather than ameliorating it, since a premature death would cut it short. See Westermann p313.
7. The Jewish commentators point out that exile rather than death was the penalty for unwitting murder. They therefore suggest that, since noone had died before Abel, Cain did not know what the result of his attack on his brother might be.
8. See Ellul (1970) for a discussion of the building of cities and D in 3.6.3 below on the arts and crafts of Cain's descendants.
9. Usmani quotes an interpretation that says that someone who is killed without trying to kill his oppressor attains the rank of martyr. This, however, is only valid if the oppressor is a fellow Muslim, and does not argue for pacifism in general. If there is any question of community or Islamic necessity, self-defence is obligatory.
10. The legal importance of these verses is indicated by their use by Doi (1984, p229) as the starting point for his chapter on "Crime and Punishment".
11. For example, the story of Tubal-Cain's accidental killing of Cain, followed by Lamech's accidental killing of Tubal-Cain. This is based on Tubal-Cain's name. See Zlotowitz p162.
12. Brueggeman (p62) also notes parallels with the prodigal son story.

3.4.3 Noah

The Noah story is the longest episode of Genesis 1-11, and appears more often in the Qur'an than the other stories under consideration. Yusuf Ali's index lists 15 surahs that refer to it, the major passages being 71, Nūh; 7, A^c rāf: 59-64 and 11, Hūd: 25-49. In addition, numerous extra-scriptural details have developed in both Jewish and Islamic traditions. There is no space here for a thorough analysis of all this material: this study will be restricted to major points of comparative interest, and will mostly summarise commentary rather than quoting details.

The Biblical and Qur'anic stories are recognisably the same. Both have:

The righteous Noah in the unrighteous society.

The warning of the flood and instructions about how to escape.

The flood: sinful society destroyed and Noah and a few others saved.

The building of the ark under the direction of God.

The saving of the animals.

The alighting of the ark on a mountain; disembarkation of passengers.

They are both stories of human wickedness and divine judgement, that see God as the rightful judge against whom no human can prevail. The One who created is the One who is in control, and therefore the One who can destroy. In particular, He can and will destroy those who oppose Him.

However, the emphases are different. The Qur'anic stories are found in numerous places, each with its own emphasis. Much space is given to the preaching of Noah, and to his interaction with his people. There are few details of ark or flood, but some discussion of members of Noah's family who were not saved. In most cases, Noah is presented as one of a series of prophets, who faced similar problems and were vindicated when their people were judged. There is little about what happened after the flood.

The Bible story is in one place, with only brief references elsewhere. There is emphasis on its uniqueness - never again would there be a similar judgement. In fact, the New Testament parallels the unique event of the flood with the unique event of the last day (2 Peter 3v5-7). There is little information about Noah and what he did before the flood, but there is plenty of detail about the ark, the flood and what happened after it.

Since there are such differences in structure and emphasis, it is these that will be compared rather than such finer differences of detail as were considered in 3.4.1 and 3.4.2.

A. Major differences

A.1 The personality of Noah

In the Qur'an, the personality of Noah is at the forefront of the stories. We see him pleading with people, agonising over rejection, praying for rescue, and longing for the salvation of his son. Most of the Qur'anic material is dialogue, and even the narrative is mostly spoken by Noah. 26 of the 28 verses of Surah 71, Nūḥ, are Noah's speech, 3 addressing the people and the remainder addressing God. The 7, A'raf, passage gives 4 of its 5 verses to dialogue between Noah and his people, and that in 11, Hūd, has no verse that does not include speech.

In the Genesis account, there is no clue as to what Noah is like as a person until after the flood when he gets drunk and angry: before the flood there is no record of his speaking at all. He is simply someone who does what God tells him. On the other hand, he is placed in the genealogy, and 5v28-29 describes his naming.

A.2 The prophethood of Noah

The Qur'anic Noah is a typical prophet - he comes to his people with a message from God, and his preaching results in a division between believers and unbelievers. He is the first prophet of judgement, and his ministry is similar in pattern to that of other prophets, in particular Lūt, Hūd and Šāliḥ and Shu'ayb (11, Hūd).

It is difficult to see how the Biblical Noah might be regarded as a prophet. The New Testament calls him a "herald (*kēru*x) of righteousness" (2 Peter 2v5). The N.I.V. translates *kēru*x "preacher", and popular thinking has him preaching and rejected¹, but the word does not necessarily imply a verbal messenger. It might rather mean that Noah himself functions as a sign of righteousness²; and certainly Genesis has no suggestion of preaching³. Moreover, far from presenting him as typical, it is at pains to stress the uniqueness of the events which surround him.

A.3 Who was suffering?

In the Qur'an, Noah is a suffering figure, with people rejecting him and plotting against him. He is the grieving prophet, saddened by the wickedness of his people (11:36) and by the defection of his son (11:45). The silent Biblical Noah is not recorded as having such problems - we might infer them from the fact that he was righteous in the midst of wickedness, but even 2 Peter 2 which describes the distress of Lot in a similar situation says nothing of Noah's sufferings.

However, Genesis does suggest that God suffered (6v6) - He was "grieved to the heart" (*yith^catsebh* 'el-libô). This is a glimpse into the mind of God that some commentators find difficult, insisting on care in interpreting anthropomorphic descriptions of God (e.g. Zlotowitz p191-2). Zlotowitz (idem) and Calvin (p249) are also wary of the idea that God could grieve, the former suggesting that the word might imply vexation and therefore anger, and the latter retaining "grieved" (*doluit*) but explaining it by saying that "the Spirit accomodates himself to our capacity".

More recent commentators draw attention to the pain of God, Brueggemann (p77-8) writing of the "deep pathos of God" as a key to the Noah story, and pointing out the use of the root *^ctsbh* which echoes the human suffering (*^citsbhôn*) and pain (*^cetsebh*) of Gen 3v16-17 and the *^citsbhôn* into which Noah was to bring comfort (5v29). Wenham (p144) says that the word is used "to express the most intense form of human emotion, a mixture of rage and bitter anguish".

What is clear over against the Qur'an is that the Genesis emphasis is on God's feelings rather than Noah's. The Qur'anic accounts give no indication of God's thoughts, pointing only to His attributes (e.g. to the forgiveness and mercy that were available to believers, 11:41).

A.4 The reasons for the flood

In the Qur'an, there are two reasons for the flood - the wickedness of the people and the rescue of Noah. Judging by the space given to each, they are equally important. They are linked by the fact that the major wickedness was the rejection of the prophet.

Rejection is a major theme. It is detailed as involving plots (71:22) and accusations of madness (54:9), of being of low degree (26:105), of being only human (23:24) and even of forgery (11:35). It is the main sin of which the unbelievers were accused. Otherwise, there are no details about their wickedness. The repeated call to worship the One God implies a problem of idolatry, and in fact the idols are named in 11:23 and 71:38, but beyond that it is simply said that they were sinners (71:4,25).

Noah's prayers for rescue are another major theme. In most cases, the prayer is for rescue (e.g. 37:75, 23:26), but in 26:118 Noah asks God to decide between him and his opponents, and, in 71:26-7, for judgement:

O my Lord! Leave not of the unbelievers a single one on earth!
For if Thou dost leave (any of) them, they will but mislead Thy
devotees, and they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones."

The purpose of the flood was, it seems, at least as much to rescue the Prophet as it was to punish the unbelievers.

Genesis describes both the details and the extent of the wickedness in 6v1-5 and 11-12. The problem is that there is no agreement as to what the details mean. The most obscure passage is that concerning the *bh^eney ha-^elōhîm* and the *b^enôth ha-'adam*, the "sons of God and the daughters of men" in 6v2. There are three main suggestions here (see Wenham p139ff):

The sons of God are heavenly beings and the daughters of men earthly beings. The passage is a polemic against contemporary religions that spoke of divine-human marriages and were characterised by cult prostitution and fertility rites.

The sons of God are the line of Seth and the daughters of men the line of Cain (or vice versa), and it is a warning against union with ungodly people.

The sons of God are rulers, and the emphasis is on the way they took wives. They are powerful men taking advantage of powerless women.

All these imply a world where the marriage relationship of 2v24 has gone wrong. It is used for self-satisfaction and not for mutual welfare, or to transgress the divine-human divide and not to obey God's commission.

It is inferred from v4 that the children of these unions were the gigantic and perhaps monstrous Nephilim. Again, there is discussion about who these were, and to what extent their might - like that of Nimrod - was directed against God. Suffice it to say that they were regarded as enemies during the conquest of Canaan, and that the implication here is that the earth contained beings contrary to the order ordained by God.

More generally, corruption (the root *shth* occurs thrice) and violence (*hms* occurs twice) infected the whole earth (6v11-12). The wickedness is described as being great and reaching to every human thought (6v5). The word *ra^c* (evil) here makes its first appearance since 3v22, and contrasts with *tôbh* (good) used to describe the daughters of *ha-'adam* in 6v2. The tree of the knowledge of *tôbh va-ra^c* has had its effect.

A.5 The reasons for Noah being saved

The Qur'anic Noah is saved because he is God's prophet. He is described in a number of ways that indicate his qualifications. He is

The faithful apostle (*rasûl 'amîn*, 26:107)

The grateful servant (*ʿabd shakūr*, 17:3)

The clear warner (*nadhīr mubīn*, 11:25, 71:2)

He is also saved because he prays. 37:75ff and 21:76-7 both start with Noah's cry for help, followed immediately by deliverance. They give only brief mentions of the destruction in the flood, which they describe as part of God's help to Noah in response to his prayers.

Genesis introduces Noah in chapter 6 by saying that he "found favour (or grace) in the eyes of the Lord" (v8). He is then said to be "righteous" and "blameless" (6v9)⁴, although what this means is not explained beyond saying that he "walked with God" (See B in 3.4.5 below). The commentators ask whether Noah was righteous as a result of finding grace, or whether he found grace because he was righteous.

- a) Zlotowitz (p194, 202ff) records traditions that say he would not have been saved without grace and suggest that he fell short of perfection because he did not preach.
- b) Cassuto (Vol II p25) describes him as perfectly righteous, and says that his sons must also have been righteous, as Noah would have been less than righteous had he not brought up his sons to be so.
- c) Westermann (p411) sees the contrasting approaches of two authors, one stressing God's choice and the other Noah's piety.
- d) Calvin (p251) sees the source of Noah's integrity as "the preventing grace of God."
- e) Wenham notes the reference to the covenant with Noah in 6v18, and sees this initiative of God as a determining factor (p175).
- f) Hebrews 11v7 says that he "became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

What is clear is that the text refers to God's choice and Noah's nature. Genesis does not say how the two are related, and the filling of the gap depends on the commitments of the commentators.

A.6 Who was destroyed?

In the Qur'an, those that reject the prophet and the message are destroyed:

But they rejected him and We delivered him, and those with him in the ark. But we overwhelmed in the flood those who rejected

Our Signs. They were indeed a blind people!

7:64

Since the story is about Noah and his people, and is usually followed by the stories of other prophets and their people, the implication is that it speaks of local rather than global events. Only a few commentators think that the flood was universal and that ^{hu}mankind is therefore descended from those in the ark (see Usmani on 11:44).

Genesis presents the flood as a universal catastrophe. That everybody and everything except those in the ark was destroyed is emphasised by repetition (6v11, 17; 7v21-23; 8v21, 9v15⁵).

A.7 Who was saved?

In Genesis, the whole of Noah's immediate family was saved - his wife, his sons and their wives - but nobody else. In the Qur'an, Noah's wife is an unbeliever who went to hell (66:10), and, as Noah prayed that not one unbeliever should survive (71:26), the implication is that she perished in the flood (see for example Usmani on 11: 40). An unbelieving son was definitely drowned, despite Noah's prayers (11:42ff). On the other hand, all believers were admitted to the ark, whether family members or not (11: 40). The criterion for salvation was not family but belief.

This is sometimes argued as being morally superior to the Biblical account (Muhajir 1965, N5&8 on chapter 2), and the commentators use the story to show that Islam transcends family ties. Maududi (N49 on Surah 11) says that, if adult children turn away from Islam, "parents should realise that all their efforts have been wasted and that there is no reason for them to hold such children dear to their hearts."⁶

A.8 The nature of the covenant.

The Qur'an mentions a covenant taken from Noah (33:7), but does not describe it. It is simply mentioned amongst other covenants - those taken from Abraham, Moses and Jesus as from Muhammad. The commentators agree that these covenants are with the prophets as individuals and are explained by the following verse:

That (God) may question the (custodians) of Truth concerning the truth they (were charged with).

33: 8

That is, the prophet is required to carry out his mission with sincerity, and to give an account of his trust. As discussed in 3.4.1, the covenant is about God's requirements and human acknowledgement of them rather than about promises to Noah and his people. However, there is blessing for their descendants in 11:48:

O Noah! Come down (from the ark) with peace from Us, and blessing on thee and on some of the Peoples (who will spring) from those with thee: but (there will be other) Peoples to whom We shall grant their pleasures (for a time), but in the end will receive a grievous penalty from Us.

The text does not have "some" or the words in Yusuf Ali's brackets. However, the commentators agree on the division of Noah's descendants into two groups, one of which will receive blessings and the other hell.

In Genesis, the post-flood covenant is universal, and is given considerable space. The promise is one of preservation, and is for all the descendants of Noah and the other living creatures. If both flood and covenant are universal, every creature on earth is included in the Noachic covenant. This covenant is without conditions. The recognition in 8v21 that human beings are still wicked and the account in 9v18ff of the sin even of the prophet and his family show that the covenant is not only with the righteous. It is a commitment to the human race and to all life on earth.

B. Extras

B.1 The Qur'an adds Noah's preaching

Noah's preaching and responses to it take up the bulk of the Qur'anic narratives. For example, of the 28 verses of Surah 71, Nuh, the first 20 describe his teaching ministry, and 21-24 are Noah's report to God on it. The message is mainly a call to turn from idolatry and to accept the prophetic message. 71 also contains teaching about forgiveness (4, 10).

The message is presented in different ways and with appeals to different aspects of God's power, benevolence and judgement. Noah pleads with his people, and speaks to them with tenderness and patience. He speaks both day and night, and both Reza Khan and

Usmani (on 71) record the tradition that he preached for 950 years before the flood.

Another strand of Noah's preaching is his justification of his own ministry in the face of a variety of accusations. For example,

7:60 has people accusing him of wandering in his mind. He replies that he is simply carrying out his commission from God.

11:27 has people saying that only the meanest of people follow him, and that he and his followers are liars. He replies that he has a clear sign from God (i.e. his message), even though they may be blind to it, and that noone is going to force them to accept it. He also points out that he expects a reward from God alone and is not asking them for anything; and he will not send his followers away just because his opponents think them mean.

B.2 The Qur'an adds Noah's dialogue with God

He tells God about his peoples' refusal to believe, about their plotting against him, and about their misleading of others (71: 21-4). He pleads for his unbelieving son, and is told that the unbelief has disqualified the son from family membership. He then asks forgiveness (11: 45-7)⁷. A prayer for forgiveness, not only for himself but for his parents and household and the believers can also be found in 71:28.

He prays for help, and for judgement on the unbelievers. The cry for help has been mentioned above. It includes prayer for rescue (e.g. 14:10, "I am one overcome: do Thou then help (me)!") and for vindication (e.g. 26:18, "Judge Thou, then, between me and them openly, and deliver me and those of the believers who are with me.")

The commentators point out that the prayers for judgement are not vindictive - in fact, Noah has preached patiently and compassionately for 950 years. They are also presumed to come after the event of 21:36, when God tells Noah that noone else is going to accept his message beyond those who have already believed. That is when he is told to stop grieving and build the ark. Further, the prayer of 71:26

is followed by the explanation "For, if Thou dost leave (any of) them, they will but mislead Thy devotees, and they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones." (71:27) Noah's concern in asking for judgement is the welfare of future generations.

B.3 Genesis adds Noah's genealogy and naming

Noah appears at the end of the litany of death of Genesis 5, as one who will "bring us comfort (*y^enah^amû*) from the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed". That is, he will somehow ease the sentence of 3v17.

B.4 Genesis adds details of the ark and the flood

The Qur'an has God telling Noah to build the ark under His inspiration (*wahy*) (11:37, 23:27), and that it was "made of broad planks and caulked with palm-fibre" (54:13), but there are no details of its construction. There is a command to board the ark, with the animals and the believers (11:40-41, 23:27), but no description of embarkation.

The flood is described with similar brevity. There are allusions to the opening of the gates of heaven (54:11), and to the "fountains of the earth" gushing forth (11:40, 23:27). The latter are literally "ovens boiling". This can mean the ovens of God's anger (Yusuf Ali N1533), but is usually taken to refer to underground water sources. In addition, the rising and abating of the flood are said to have occurred at God's command (11:40, 44).

In contrast, Genesis has details of the size, material and design of the ark, and describes its inhabitants four times - twice when God is giving instructions, and twice when they enter. The rising of the flood is then described at length, as is the falling of the waters and the sending of the birds. 46 of the 63 verses in chapters 6-8 are given to these details.

B.5 Genesis adds Noah's sacrifice and drunkenness

There is no parallel to these in the Qur'an, although there is a possible reflection of Ham's impiety in the drowned son (see Newby 1986). The description of Noah as drunk and naked in 9v20-22 is

taken by many Muslims as an insult to the prophet, which proves the distortion of the Bible (e.g. Sarwar 1984, p30).

In Genesis, the incident provokes many questions:

(a) What does it say about the character of Noah? Wenham (p166) contrasts the incident with the apotheosis of heroes at the ends of other flood stories, but also points out (p199) that drinking wine is not considered sinful in the Old Testament unless carried to excess. It is therefore not clear whether Noah is represented as "falling".

(b) What was Ham's sin, and why was Canaan cursed for it? The commentators give a variety of suggestions, but all conclude that the sin had a sexual dimension and that Ham's lack of respect for his parent was his major fault. The cursing of Canaan rather than Ham is also discussed, but no general agreement reached.

(c) What implications do the blessings and cursings have for future generations? Interpretations here vary from the suggestion that the blessings and cursings reflect backwards the fact of Israel's enmity with the Canaanites⁸, through Cassuto's suggestion that the Canaanites were cursed because they were to be guilty of the sort of sexual sins of which Ham was guilty (Vol II p152-3), to the assertion that Noah pronounced God's judgement and blessing for future generations (Calvin p306-10).

The latter is problematic because it has led to the teaching that certain races are irrevocably under God's curse, and in particular to the suggestion that Ham and his descendants became black as a result of it⁹. There is no trace of the latter in the text, and one can question whether an angry curse from a drunken man could be the voice of God. Further, the relatedness of humanity implied by Genesis 10 and the declaration that Abraham was to be for the blessing of all peoples (Gen 12v3) make the permanent cursing of a branch of humanity unlikely.

What is clear is that salvation from flood did not guarantee continued piety or family unity, and that sexual immodesty and filial impiety

have dire consequences. It is also clear from the rest of the Old Testament that there was a historical enmity between Israel and the Canaanites, which signals the possibility of feuds between people groups that, from a small beginning, continue through generations.

C. How does the Qur'an use the stories?

The Qur'anic stories are used for different purposes in different surahs, although they are all Meccan and therefore set in the context of Muhammad's struggles against opposition.

A repeated motif is that they are a sign (*āyah*) which people are to think over (Usmani) or take as a warning (Yusuf Ali) (54:15, 51:20, 26:121, 25:37). The ark is described as a *tadhkīr* (reminder) (69:12) or an *āyah* (29:15). It is not God's dealings with Noah that are a sign: Muhammad's knowledge of the story is a sign of his inspiration. It is claimed that he could not have learnt the Bible stories from people he met. That the Qur'an describes many prophets in similar terms to the Bible was to act as proof to Jews and Christians of the divine origin of the message¹⁰.

The Noah passages are understood as parallels of Muhammad's experience. The commentators agree that the accusations levelled at Noah are those levelled at Muhammad, and that the messages for Noah's people are also messages to Muhammad's opponents. Of particular interest is 11:35:

Or do they say, "He has forged it"? Say: if I had forged it, on me were my sin! And I am free from the sins of which ye are guilty.

This comes in the middle of the story of Noah, but Noah was not given a book. Although it might refer to his preaching, most commentators think that it is directly about Muhammad and the Qur'an.

The contexts are generally those of encouraging Muhammad and the Muslims, of warning unbelievers, and of underlining the separation between believers and unbelievers. For example,

Azad (vol 2 p 464) on 7, A'raf writes: "The central idea of this chapter was to cheer up the early followers of the prophet with

the thought that they should not feel disheartened by the huge obstacles crossing their path but should feel assured that by adhering to the truth steadfastly they would inevitably, or as a matter of course, overcome their obstacles and achieve success."

Yusuf Ali in his introduction to 71, Nūḥ, writes: "The story of Noah's agony is almost a parable for the Holy Prophet's persecution in the Meccan period."

Usmani on 11:34 quotes one of his favourite authorities as saying: "Up to this place the demands and questions of Noah's people were the same as those of the Prophet's people. In other words, all these answers were given to the Arabs."

The Qur'anic Noah is, then, a prophet of the same kind as Muhammad. His experiences parallel those of Muhammad in Mecca and are used to encourage and exhort Muhammad and the Muslims as well as to warn their opponents.

D Aspects of the Genesis story highlighted by the comparison

D.1 Judgement or grace?

The Noah story is often related as a paradigm judgement. In contrast, such commentators as Brueggemann present it as a paradigm of grace. The comparative study highlights the question.

Judgement is highlighted by the similarities with the Qur'an, where the judging of the wicked and the rescue of the righteous is the central theme. Grace is highlighted by the differences with the Qur'an, and particularly the silence of Noah, the grief of God and the unconditional covenant. The question for Genesis is then how judgement and grace relate. The unconditional covenant implies that the Qur'anic picture of grace for the righteous and judgement for the wicked is inapplicable: there is grace for the wicked in Gen 8v21.

Further, the comparison suggests that Genesis explores these questions more from the divine than from the human point of view: that these chapters are not about how we can be righteous, but about how God responds to our unrighteousness.

D.2 The flood as a turning point

Over against the Qur'an, the uniqueness of the Noah story is remarkable. Further, the sheer space given to it in Genesis - four out of eleven chapters of pre-history - indicates its importance. This suggests that the story is pivotal in Genesis 1-11 as a unique event that divides history into before and after the flood. The comparison highlights the divide and provokes the exploration of several areas.

The unmaking and remaking of the world

Chapter 7 gives a series of reversals of the creation in chapter 1, and chapter 8 describes a re-making, in which the pattern is emphasised by repetitions and numbers:

1v6-7: The waters are separated.

7v11: The waters break their bounds.

8v2: The bounds are set again.

1v9-10: The waters are cleared from the dry land.

7v19-10: The dry land disappears.

8v5-14: The dry land reappears.

1v11-12: The plants are made.

8v11: The plants reappear.

1v20-25: The animals (and humans, v26ff) are made.

7v21-23: The animals are killed (including human beings).

8v15-19: The animals reappear (including human beings).

The blessing of the new order

As God blessed the newly made humans in 1v28, so He repeats the blessing in 9v1. They are still to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth", but their dominion will be marked by fear and dread (9v2-3). There is then a repetition of the fact that human beings are made in the image of God, but this is in the context of bloodshed. The blessing from before the flood continues after the flood, but in a world-gone-wrong.

God's response to the world gone wrong

Before the flood, there are the responses of limiting life span (6v3), of grief (6v6) and of judgement (6v7). There is also the "but" of 6v8:

God's response of grace in accepting Noah. Despite grief and anger, God determines to preserve something of what He has made. After the flood, there is the response of the covenant: God foregoes the option of repeating the response of destruction, and commits Himself unconditionally to the continuation of the human race.

What has changed?

Why does God who chooses to judge before the flood choose never to repeat the same judgement after it? Brueggemann (p73) posits a change in God. Yet He refers to the covenant before as well as after the flood (6v18) and the choice to save Noah was as much part of His action as was the choice to destroy others. This apparent paradox will be further explored in 3.6.1 and 3.6.5.

D.3 Who is Noah?

The comparative reading has highlighted Noah's silence, the mystery of his righteousness, his quiet obedience and God's sovereign choice. The "Mr Noah" of the childrens' stories has disappeared, and in his place is an enigmatic figure who is somehow a *kēru*x of righteousness but paradoxically becomes drunk and curses his grandson.

E. Summary of issues

Although Genesis and the Qur'an have similar plots, the differences in emphasis are so marked that, in intent and theology, they tell different stories¹¹. What they have in common is that both deal with God's responses to evil. The different responses raise several questions.

E.1 What is God's response to a world gone wrong?

Both Qur'an and Genesis present a sinful society that rejects God's ways. In the Qur'an, God deals with this by sending a prophet. He then blesses those who accept the messenger and destroys those who oppose him. This pattern is repeated with other peoples at other times and in other places, notably in Mecca at the time of Muhammad.

In Genesis, God's primary response is grief, which results in the flood but also in the preservation of one family and then, following Noah's

sacrifice, the unconditional covenant in the face of continuing wickedness. Over against the Qur'an, it is striking that the choices of destruction and preservation apply to the same sorts of people under the same conditions of wickedness. God is not now to be expected to destroy the wicked and save the righteous, but to care for all as long as the earth exists.

E.2 Is the world as God originally made it?

As we have seen in the Adam stories, Islam has no doctrine of the fall: there is no hint that either human beings or the earth are anything other than as God originally created them.

The account of the unmaking and remaking of the world in Gen 7-9 gives an even stronger picture of the fallenness of the world than does that of the expulsion from Eden. The world after the flood is similar to the original creation - the waters have divided, the land has reappeared, and the plants and animals and human beings are all in place again. But everything is also different. Relationships are marked by bloodshed, and people are wicked from the heart. If we are to believe that there was no rainbow before the flood, it even points to a change in the non-living world. There might also be changes due to the flood and the opening and closing of the various sources of water. It is this as well as the curse on the ground in chapter 3 that indicates ^{that} human sin has affected all creation.

E.3 What is God's commitment to human beings?

The Qur'anic Noah has a message that points to God's forgiveness and blessing if people will only listen (71:10ff). It includes the promise of rain, wealth and offspring, and of resurrection after death. However, this is dependent upon the people accepting the message. What actually happens is that the rains become their scourge rather than their blessing; and the blessing following the flood (11:48) indicates that the division between the blessed and the judged will continue into future generations.

Thus the commitment of God is to send messengers to call people back to the right way, to bless those who accept them, and to judge those

who do not. 11:48 ("We shall grant their pleasures for a time") suggests that, until the judgement, all people will be able to enjoy creation.

Genesis also has God destroying the wicked, but it has no warning prophet. However, in that the flood is unique, it cannot be seen as a pattern for God's dealings with humanity. Rather, it shows an alternative that He has chosen not to repeat. God makes an unconditional commitment to all living beings despite continuing wickedness (8v21), which has nothing to do with judgement, or with improving people. It is only that God will never send a similar judgement, and that the patterns of seasons and harvests and the blessings of fruitfulness will continue as long as the earth continues.

In this, God limits His options for dealing with sin.

Notes on 3.4.3

1. See for example Batchelor (1985) stories 7 and 8, and the song in sermon 2 of Appendix II.
2. Compare Brueggeman's description of Noah as "the bearer of a new possibility" (p79).
3. Zlotowitz (p194, 203) suggests that Noah fell short of God's ideal because he did not preach, and that this was why he needed grace.
4. See Wenham p169-70 for a discussion of the meanings of these words.
5. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, in his harmonisation with the Qur'an, argues at length that Genesis does not teach a universal flood.
6. Turning from Islam also disinherits children, since no non-Muslim can inherit from a Muslim under sharī'ah law (See Doi 1984 p319).
7. Defending the innocence of the prophets, the commentators insist that his only error has been one of ignorance - Usmani suggests that, because of his son's hypocrisy, he had not recognised him as an unbeliever.
8. Westermann (p490-1) surveys the options and concludes that "the sweep of the possibilities . . . is amazing".
9. Felder 1991 explores such racist hermeneutics.
10. See for example Usmani's note on 11:49.
11. Compare Waldman's 1985 comparative study of the Joseph stories.

3.4.4 Eve

A. The Qur'an

A.1 The stories

One of the greatest differences between the Qur'anic and Biblical versions of the Adam stories is that the former hardly mention Eve. It is not that she is absent, but that she is hidden behind her husband. She is Adam's unnamed wife, and often her presence is indicated only by dual word forms.

In Surah 2 :30-39, Adam appears alone until he is told to dwell with his wife in the garden. Dual verbs then show that both are warned against eating, and both disobey. The sending to earth is plural, and Adam is alone again in learning and using the words of repentance.

In Surah 7:11-25, it is Adam alone before whom the angels bow. His wife appears when he is put into the garden, and is thereafter included through dual verbs. The temptation and disobedience are joint actions, as is the subsequent repentance. The banishment to earth is again plural.

In Surah 20:116-123, the wife appears when God warns Adam that Satan is an enemy to both. It is Adam alone that is tempted, but they eat together. Nevertheless, it is Adam that is said to have allowed himself to be seduced, and who repents and is guided. There is a dual when both are sent down to earth, but this is followed by plurals.

The other passages, in Surahs 15, 18 and 38, are concerned only with Adam and Iblis, and have no mention of the wife.

When she is present, there is no role differentiation between wife and husband. There is no consensus over her presence between the various accounts except that she appears before the temptation and is included in the expulsion: presumably, she was there through the temptation, eating and repentance, but this is not always important.

Before Adam was put in the garden, the wife is absent altogether. It is Adam that is made khalīfah, Adam that is taught the names and

Adam that receives homage from the angels. It is also Adam who is a prophet.

Another contrast is in interpretations. While Biblical commentators use the stories to discuss gender differences¹, our Qur'anic commentators do not. The Qur'anic material itself gives little possibility of doing so, although the stories surrounding it have been used to make statements about women (see Smith and Haddad 1982).

These stories are mainly variations on the Genesis story, but with emphases on Eve's role as temptress that are missing from Genesis. Thus, for example, Usmani on 2:36 comments:

It is said that Adam and Hawwa began to live in the paradise and Satan was thrown away from that place of reverence. His malignance was increased and at last with the help of the snake and the peacock he entered into paradise and insinuated the mother Hawwa to eat of that tree. She was simple and easily caught in the net of the satanic persuasions and ate of that tree and also caused Adam to eat it and assured him that by its eating he would come more favourite and nearer to God.

While Usmani concludes nothing about the nature of women from this, Kashful Mahjub has, "A woman was the cause of the first calamity that overtook Adam in paradise" (p364). As many Muslims point out, it is not the Qur'an itself but its interpretation that is the problem²; and the problem with the interpretation is that it has often become as authoritative in practice as the Qur'an (see also 2.3.2).

A.2 The creation of woman

The Qur'anic Adam stories describe God's intention of making the *khālifah* who is Adam, but then by implication also his descendants. They also describe the making of man from clay and his enlivening by the breath of God (15:26-9, 38:72). The latter descriptions are followed by the story of the angels' prostration and Iblis' rebellion, where the man is always singular. With the Baqarah passage, this implies that they refer to Adam alone. However, the word *insān* used in 15:26 usually refers to humans rather than to males, and *bashar* which is used elsewhere can mean either.

In anticipation of the discussion of the Genesis story, it is interesting to note that Adam is given a role - that of *khalīfah* - but that there is no indication as to whether this has gender implications. Role differences between male and female in Islamic societies are usually marked, and these differences have Qur'anic roots, but they are not in the Adam stories.

The specific creation of woman is mentioned at the beginning of Surah 4, Nisā', which contains much of the Qur'anic teaching on women:

O Mankind! Reverence your Guardian Lord, who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women - reverence God, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for God watches over you.

Usmani and Reza Khan, the latter in some detail, tell the story of Eve being made out of Adam's rib. Yusuf Ali and Maududi mention the Biblical story, but point out that the Qur'an does not require it. Azad sees no need of discussing how the mate came from the first individual. In each case, the lesson drawn has to do with the unity and mutuality of human beings rather than that of male and female.

The creation of woman is also mentioned in 7, A'rāf: 189, but this time with further explanation:

It is He who made you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature³, in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When they are united, she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed). When she grows heavy, they both pray to God their Lord, (saying): "If Thou givest us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful. But when He giveth them a goodly child, they ascribe to others a share in the gift they have received: God is exalted high above the partners they ascribe to Him.

The context here is the propensity to credit the wrong persons for God's actions, and the main focus is on God as the Creator of both man and woman and the originator of procreation. Within this, however, is teaching about the role and purpose of woman.

The purpose of the creation of woman is "that he might dwell with her". The word for "dwell" can also mean, "be tranquil with", "feel at home" or "rely on", and is translated by Usmani as "rest", by Azad as

"dwell in mutual comfort", and by Reza Khan as chain pa'ey, indicating finding peace. Usmani and Maududi add the idea of the spouse being given for comfort.

The role is that of wife and mother. This is affirmed, or perhaps assumed, elsewhere in the Qur'an and throughout traditional Islamic teaching, both ancient or modern. Some contemporary women apologists for Islam see such a clear role assignment as a strength⁴. These include Haneef (1979) and Heeren and Lemu (1978) who are western converts to Islam, and see current western uncertainties about gender roles as a problem.

Two related questions arise. First, does the differentiation of gender roles imply inequality? Second, is the Qur'anic assumption of distinct roles descriptive or prescriptive? Answers to these questions arguably depend more on the presuppositions of the respondent than on actual Qur'anic data. Islamic debate has focussed on Surah 4, Nisā':34, which has attracted a range of interpretation from outright sexism (Usmani) through measured argument about biological gender differences (Maududi⁵) to a concern for gender equality (Azad) and definite feminism (Engineer 1992 p45ff and Mernissi 1991 p153ff).

B. Genesis

Turning to Genesis 1-11, there are traditional interpretations that see the chapters as teaching male superiority, and a whole spectrum through to those that would use them to assert female superiority. The Genesis text leaves gaps and poses questions that can only be answered from elsewhere; and the choice of where to look for filling material is determined by the commitments and passions of the reader. The problem is that, as in Islam, interpretations may become more authoritative than the text.

It is not my intention to survey interpretations but to explore the text; but I should first state my expectation that it will prove liberating to women. I approach the text prepared to find gender differences, but not to find women inferior or subordinate⁶. I also approach it in the belief that interpreters are part of the fallen

world, and that, as with Adam and Eve, male interpreters are likely to blame women (and vice versa!).

Here, I shall present some observations on the text chapter by chapter, and then some of the questions that arise in reading it alongside the Qur'an. 3.5.1 below will explore some of the implications for Elswick.

C.1 Genesis 1-2

In Genesis 1, creation in the image of God is immediately represented as the making of male and female. There is no distinction of natures or roles, and no precedence of one over the other. The creation of the two as together constituting humanity is apparently simultaneous, and there is no clue as to their differences. Male and female are made together, blessed together and told to fill and rule the earth together.

The word for "man" in 1v26-7 is the singular *'adam*, and can refer either to a human being or to a male. It is also used as the name of the first man. There is another word, *'ish*, for a male human being, but only one word - *'ishshah* - used for a female human being. Further, *'adam* is sometimes used with and sometimes without the definite article, and in 5v3-5 it is clearly a personal name.

It is, then, for the reader to decide where the word stands for humanity, where for male man and where for a particular individual. That the ambiguity is deliberate is suggested by 5v1-5, where *'adam* is used both for humanity and for Adam. Tribble (1978 chapter 4) has suggested that *'adam* is undifferentiated humanity until 2v23, when male and female appear, and I shall highlight the return to the singular in 3v9 and 3v22-4. However, as elsewhere in Genesis 1-11 the ambiguity leaves the text open.

Chapter 2 moves from the creation of male and female as one humanity to differentiation between woman and man. This describes the situation before the fall: it shows male and female as God originally intended.

It is difficult to find specific gender roles in Genesis 2: the chapter is rather about relationships and purposes. First, the 'adam is made because the 'adamah needs him (v5), the related names implying a fundamental relationship between the man and the ground. Chapter 1 has the plants given to the humans for food: chapter 2 has the human given to the ground so that the plants can grow. The mutuality and interdependence of 'adam and 'adamah are unmistakable.

In parallel, the woman is made because the man needs her. It is not good for the man to be alone - as the earth could not fulfil its purpose without the man, the man could not fulfil his without the woman. As God made the man out of the ground, He makes the woman out of the man. The names reflect this. The man is now 'ish, and the woman, 'ishshah.

Chapter 1 makes the ruling and filling of the earth a joint human responsibility. Chapter 2 shows that neither can be done by the male alone. The word ezer, helper, suggests the dependence of the man on the woman in the performance of his responsibilities: his recognition of her as of the same kind as himself suggests their equality⁷.

Verse 24, which is used by Jesus in describing marriage, further underlines the dependence of the man on the woman, as he leaves behind his parents to be joined to her. This could also be a picture of the man being given to the woman as the woman has just been given to the man: as such, it is a striking matriarchal model that seems to have been ignored for most of Biblical history. Equality is then affirmed by the statement that the two become "one flesh". The mutuality and interdependence of the 'ish and the 'ishshah are, one would have thought, unmistakable.

B.2 Genesis 3

Here, the man and the woman appear as separate characters. Various aspects of the chapter are relevant to the understanding of gender, although there is always a question as to how far Adam and Eve are archetypal male and female, and how far they are only archetypal humans.

The male and female roles in the sin.

It is the woman who is approached by the serpent, and it is her temptation and thought processes that are recorded. The man is said to be "with her", and takes the fruit and eats without comment. It is therefore not clear whether he was listening to the conversation with the serpent, whether he underwent any battles with his conscience, or even whether he was aware of the origin of the fruit (although God's later indictment suggests that he knew what he was eating). It seems that the man who was supposed to cling to the woman has abandoned her in her temptation, and the woman who was supposed to help the man in his responsibilities has helped him to neglect the most basic of them. Both, then, are responsible. The suggestion that it was Eve's fault that Adam ate is not in the temptation story: it comes from Adam after he fell.

The male and female roles in the calling to account.

Although both man and woman hide, it is to the man that God calls, "Where are you (singular)?" It is then the man who answers, again in the singular. It is only after he blames the woman that God speaks to her. Further, the sentence on the man blames him for listening to his wife: his very excuse is what he is judged for. Not only is Adam just as responsible as Eve: there is an implied warning to men here not to blame their wives for their own misdeeds.

The relationship between male and female following the sin.

From verse 10, it is clear that the original unity and mutuality has been damaged. First, Adam speaks of his own fear and shame, with no reference to the woman. He then seeks to blame her for what he has done. He even implies that it is God's fault for giving him the woman in the first place. This is a sad change from the cry of joyful recognition in 2v23. The woman's response to the man is not recorded, but she follows his pattern of seeking to blame someone else for her own sin.

The different sentences on the man and the woman.

The "curses" expand on the changed relationship between male and

female, but also point out the changed relationship between woman and serpent, and between man and ground (See C4 in 3.4.1).

The changed gender relationships are seen in the woman's sentence:

Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

v17

There has been much discussion about the nature of the desire and the rule. Suffice it here to note the change in the balance of the relationship - from mutuality to dependence and domination. Where the man could not manage without the woman, the woman is now driven by desire for the man. Where both were to rule over the creatures, the man will now rule over the woman. This breakdown in the 'ish/'ishshah relationship parallels the breakdown in 'adam/'adamah relationship in the man's sentence.

The question of gender roles arises: does the focus of the woman's sentence on marriage and child-bearing and that of the man's on the earth imply a role division? I have three observations here:

First, both child-bearing and caring for the earth were given as joint responsibilities in chapter 1. It is evident that procreation cannot occur without both male and female: the need of the man for a helper in chapter 2 suggests that caring for the earth also requires both.

Second, I have suggested that Genesis 2 does not prescribe fundamental roles but describes fundamental relationships. In that case, the sentences indicate that these relationships have gone wrong.

Third, it is clear from the rest of the Bible and from observation of the world that, in general, humanity has divided gender roles as in the "curses". If the sentences are about a world gone wrong, they suggest that such role divisions are part of the wrongness of the world, especially insofar as they are accompanied by dependence and domination, and by pain and futility.

The naming of Eve.

A cursory reading of chapter 2 suggests that the man named the woman in verse 23, just as he named the animals in verses 19-20. A closer reading suggests otherwise: the word "name" is missing from verse 23, and "called" is passive. Thus the dimension of actively naming the woman is missing. Rather, the man is announcing his recognition of the woman as a creature like him, and therefore having the same name as him. As Ramban explains:

She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh and therefore, of all the creatures to whom I have given names she is worthy of being called by the same name as mine. Zlotowitz, p 110.

This is important if naming is seen as establishing authority over the thing named. It is then significant that the naming of Eve as mother, with the active calling by Adam and including the word "name", comes after the fall. This does not mean that the role of mother is in itself part of the world gone wrong - presumably it is already implied in the filling of the earth in 1v28 - but that the combination of male authority and limited female role in 3v20 cannot be seen as prescriptive.

The expulsion from the garden.

Over against the duals and plurals of the Qur'anic expulsion orders, Genesis 3v22-24 mentions only the singular - *ha-'adam*. Commentators do not appear to notice this.

What, we might ask, about the woman? In chapter 4, it is obvious that she also left Eden. Does this mean that she is subsumed into her husband? Or did she leave voluntarily, to accompany the man? If so, was it because she could not do without him, or was it because she had compassion on him because he could not manage without her⁸?

Perhaps the most likely explanation is that *ha-'adam* here is neither male man nor Adam, but humanity as in 1v27. If so, it emphasises the unity of human kind in its alienation from Eden. The singular call to *ha-'adam* in verse 9 might then emphasise our unity in responsibility and in hiding from God, and both this and the expulsion echo the singular of the prohibition in 2v17⁹.

B.3 Genesis 4

Nearly all the discussion about gender from the early chapters of Genesis is concerned with chapters 2 and 3: there is little that looks at chapter 4 in this context¹⁰. Yet, with its description of Eve as mother, chapter 4 offers some interesting balances to chapters 2 and 3¹¹.

First, while the genealogies focus on men as begetters, the births of both Cain and Abel and of Seth (as well as the children of Lamech) focus on the woman. Given the reason for Eve's name in 1v20, this is not surprising.

Second, it is Eve who names Seth, and, by implication, she who names Cain and Abel. If we are to consider naming as a symbol of authority, this gives a balance to Adam's naming of Eve in chapter 3, and to Seth's naming of his son in 4v26. The surprising thing is that most commentators ignore this. Westermann notes it but says that there is no good reason why the mother is the namer in v25 while the father is the namer in v26. On the other hand, neither does he make anything of it being Adam who names Eve.

Third, there is a parallel between Eve's cry of 4v1 and Adam's cry of 2v23. Eve's statement *qānîthî 'îsh 'eth-YHWH* (N.I.V. "with the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man") in 4v1 presents difficulties in every word. There are, however, several things that are clear, and that can give insight without opting for any particular translation:

Qānîthî, "I have brought forth", is unusual in describing a birth, more usually meaning "I have bought" or "I have obtained". This is the first recorded birth, and the word can therefore indicate a response to a new and perhaps unexpected event.

The word "man" (*îsh*) is not used elsewhere for a baby. The idea of the woman bringing forth the man then recalls the previous use of the word in 2v23-4, where the woman comes from the man.

The words for "with the help of the Lord" (*'eth-YHWH*) are perhaps the most difficult, since it is not clear whether *'eth* marks a direct object or acts as a preposition meaning "with". In

either case, the meaning is obscure. What is clear, however, is that the involvement of God is recognised.

If the strangeness of the language is taken as a pointer to the significance of the event rather than as a reason for consigning it to obscurity, all this suggests a parallel with 2v23. Eve's cry of recognition of her son then echoes Adam's cry of recognition of his wife, and we have the man coming from the woman as we had the woman coming from the man:

God takes the *'ishshah* from the *'ish* (Adam): He takes the *'ish* (Cain) from the *'ishshsh*.

The man shares with God in creation by naming the animals: the woman shares with God in creation by bearing a child.

The man names his wife, but the woman names her sons.

This is particularly significant if we see Genesis 1-11 as a spiral of creation/fall stories, rather than as one creation and fall followed by a downward spiral (see B.1 in 3.6.1). The first birth in 4v1-2 is then even more clearly parallel with the creation of woman in chapter 2.

B.4 Genesis 5-11

These chapters have little about women. Pardes 1993 comments on chapter 5 as P material that avoids mentioning them, and Dennis 1994 on 6v1-5 as an account of an innocent female earth invaded by heavenly males, but beyond this the chapters are little used to discuss gender issues.

It is, perhaps, significant that, in the world-gone-wrong, women only appear as silent spouses (in the story of Noah) or as exploited (in 6v1-5). In particular, God's determination to limit lifespan is in response to the violation of the good daughters of *ha-'adam*, and his grief which leads to the flood follows the use of these women to produce monstrous men (See A.4 in 3.4.3). It seems that Genesis is

recording both the wrong domination of women by men that was announced in 3v16 and God's anger, grief and determination to do something about it.

C. In summary

The Genesis stories, as the Qur'an stories, can be read as teaching mutuality, partnership, and equality between males and females. Taken as a whole, they exhibit fine balances to ensure this. The problem is that, as every other aspect of life, the balance has gone wrong; and the centrality given to gender differentiation suggests that this wrong balance is a central factor of life after the fall.

It is therefore only to be expected that both Muslims and Christians, in their shared humanity, will interpret their scriptures according to the false balance. All hermeneutics, whether patriarchal or feminist or struggling for an intermediate balance, are post-fall hermeneutics, and should therefore be viewed with suspicion. The problem in both faiths is that the interpretations have often become more authoritative than the Scriptures themselves.

The khalifah/image distinction noted in the Adam stories suggests an important question here: should we approach gender issues through consideration of roles or of relationships? It has been suggested that Genesis teaches essentially about relationships, and that role problems are a result of those relationships going wrong.

Although the Qur'an has some information about male/female relationships, most discussion of women in Islam is about their roles. Western and Christian discussion also tends to focus on roles: this study suggests that this might be the wrong starting point: that, if we could but get our relationships right, the roles would follow.

Notes on 3.4.4

1. For a history of this, see Pagels 1988.
2. e.g. Heeren and Lemu 1978, Smith and Haddad 1982, Hassan 1991, Mernissi 1991, Ahmed 1992.
3. The words "of like nature" are not in the Arabic. Yusuf Ali has interpreted the particle *minhā* to imply not only that the woman comes from the man, but also that she is of him - like him. The same construction is used in Nisā' 1: the other translations do not add the interpretation of likeness.
4. For example, Heeren in Heeren and Lemu (1978 p43) asserts that the role division in 2:228 gives her just what she needs: "It grants me the right to depend on my husband".
5. For a discussion of Maududi on women, see Khan 1972, which discusses his Urdu Purdah. His book on Birth Control (1980) is available in English.
6. This is not only because of my personal passions as a woman, but also because I do not see the rest of the Bible as suggesting female inferiority.
7. Proverbs 31v10-31 is an interesting commentary on the ideal ezer. She is provider, tiller and housekeeper, but the care of children is not specifically mentioned.
8. This is the outline of a conversation with Rabbi Moshe Yehudai.
9. Gordon Wenham has suggested to me that, as hinted in his Genesis commentary (p76), the singulars point to the man as the one who has the prime responsibility for the fall. It is his eating that is the decisive act that is at the centre of Genesis 3, and as his was the prohibition so his was the calling to account and the expulsion. However, the woman clearly understood herself as included in the prohibition (3v3), so it seems more likely to me that the singulars refer to humanity in solidarity.
10. Pardes 1993 discusses Eve's naming of her sons as a challenge to what she sees as the patriarchal creative claims of both God and Adam. This depends on the suggestion that Adam in 2v23-4 is claiming to be Eve's father. Dennis 1994 and Otwell 1972 also explore the significance of women as namers, the latter pointing out that mothers name more often than fathers in the Old Testament.
11. This focus on Eve as mother arose from the comparison with the Qur'anic Cain and Abel story, in which their birth is not mentioned.

3.4.5 Enoch

Idrīs is mentioned in Surahs 21:85-6 and 19:56-7. The Qur'an gives no clue as to his identity, but he is generally agreed to be Enoch. Yusuf Ali points out that this is not necessarily so (N2508 on 19:56), and Usmani says cautiously that Idrīs "is said to have lived between Hazrat Adam and Hazrat Noah according to more authentic research" (N67 on 19:56). Reza Khan expresses no doubts, saying that Idris' name was originally Akhnūkh, and giving details of his relationship with Noah and Adam¹.

A. Similarities

A.1 Enoch/Idris is righteous.

The Qur'an says that he was sincere (*ṣidīq*), one of the patient (*min aṣ-ṣābrīn*) and one of the righteous (*min aṣ-ṣāliḥīn*). He was also a prophet. Genesis says that he "walked with God".

A.2 Something unusual happened at the end of his life.

Genesis says that he was not, and that God took him: Hebrews explains that he did not die. The Qur'an states only that God raised² him to a high place. Popular thinking agrees that he did not die, but Yusuf Ali suggests other interpretations: the high place could have been on earth³.

A.3 Enoch/Idrīs appears briefly in lists of people.

In the Qur'an, he is one of several prophets or righteous men. The Surah 19 list includes Zakariya, Jesus, Abraham, Moses, Adam and Noah. All are described as prophets (*anbiyya'*) who received God's grace and were guided and chosen by Him. Surah 21 is called "Prophets", and Idris is one of thirteen, and the recurring pattern is that of perseverance and rescue.

In Hebrews, Enoch is one of the heroes of faith. Some of them were rescued in this life, but often their vindication did not occur before death. In Genesis, Enoch appears in the genealogy of chapter 5.

A.4 The stories occur in the context of judgement.

In Genesis, it comes in a list of people who received the judgement of

death which introduces the judgement of the flood. Both Surahs 19 and 21 use the stories of the prophets to warn of the consequences of unbelief.

A.5 The stories have inspired speculation and legend.

Perhaps because of the brevity of the stories, and perhaps because of the unusual ending to his life, Enoch has inspired speculation. In Jewish writings, he becomes an intermediary between humans and God, and after ruling on earth ascends to heaven in a fiery chariot. There, he becomes the angel Metatron. Later writers are less positive, suggesting that he vacillated between righteousness and wickedness, and that God took him during a righteous period to prevent relapse⁴.

Our traditional Qur'anic commentators offer some of the legend about Enoch's learning. Both Usmani and Reza Khan mention him as the originator of astronomy, arithmetic, writing with the pen, sewing and weights and measures. Reza Khan adds that he was given thirty books by God, and that the name Idrīs was given to him because of his learning (*dars*).

B. Differences

His righteousness is described in different terms. The Qur'an describes what Idris was like, placing him as one of a class of people - those who are patient and persevere, who are virtuous and do right, and who are sincere and tell the truth. These are all qualifications for prophethood.

The Genesis picture is that of "walking with God"; a phrase apparently describing perfect relationship with God⁵. Mic 6v8 uses it as a summary of God's requirements, and Mal 2v6 to describe what God wants from His priests. However, it is used sparingly of actual human beings: apart from Enoch, the only person who "walked with God" was Noah (Gen 6v9)⁶.

Alongside the picture of people walking with God is that of God walking in the garden in Gen 3v8. Some commentators suggest a deliberate contrast here. God walks in the garden while Adam hides:

Enoch responds to God by walking with him. "Walking with God" is then a picture of the original communion with God, which is broken when humans choose disobedience.

The Qur'an, then, focusses on Enoch's qualities, whereas the Bible focusses on his relationship with God. Apart from the Hebrews comment that he had faith, it says nothing about what he did or what he was like as a person.

In Genesis, Enoch is the odd one out. In both Hebrews and the Qur'an, he is one of a number of similar, godly, people. In Genesis 5, he stands out as being different: the chain of death is broken by one who did not die. He also stands out as having by far the shortest lifespan.

In Genesis, Enoch has a place in history. He is found in a genealogy that indicates the continuity and relatedness of the human race. The Qur'an gives no clue as to who he was or when he lived.

C. How does the Qur'an use the stories?

In Surah 21, Idrīs is simply an extra example of someone who had patience and received mercy from God. In Surah 19, he is an example of someone who received special favour.

It is not clear what is added by the inclusion of Idrīs, and the commentaries give little clue. Yusuf Ali suggests that Surah 19 presents him as one who kept to sincerity and truth despite having been given a high position. This adds to the surah, but it depends on Ali's particular interpretation and does not equate Idrīs with Enoch. Other commentators give stories about Idrīs without saying what is to be learnt from them.

D. Aspects of the Genesis story highlighted by the comparison

The main effect of the comparison is that Enoch is included in the study. Had there been no Qur'anic parallel, he might have been marginalised. As it is, the comparative reading highlights him as unusual and enigmatic.

At one level, he is not very interesting. His genealogical place has to be filled, but he is of no more interest than Mahalahel (v15-17). At another level, he is fascinating: he has caused much speculation including the suggestion that Genesis is de-mythologising a well-known story (see 3.6.1). This is also speculation. What has been highlighted from the text is Enoch as the odd one out, the one who did not die. This raises questions about the natural end of the godly, the nature of death and, by showing that the most godly person did not live the longest, about longevity.

E. Summary of issues

Even such a brief story raises two major issues between Qur'an and Bible.

E.1 Righteousness

Enoch is added to Abel and Noah as a figure about whose righteousness we have little information in Genesis. However, the Qur'anic language suggests that righteousness has to do with qualities and actions, while the Genesis language indicates a relationship with God. This can be seen as reflecting the image/*khalīfah* distinction of function and status or nature and relationship as primary human definition.

E.2 Death

Is death universal and normal? The Qur'anic Adam story is interpreted as meaning that God planned from the beginning that human beings should spend some time on earth and then return to paradise. In contrast, Genesis has the threat of death in 2v17 and the sentence of death in 3v19. Enoch's not dying opens the question: Is escape from death possible? Can other people escape death? This is not escaping death by remaining alive on the earth, but reaching eternity without going through death.

Notes on 3.4.5

1. He says that he was Noah's father's paternal grandfather, that he was the first prophet after Adam, and that his father was Sheth son of Adam. Tabari (History vol I p434ff) agrees with the identity, but offers various genealogical possibilities.
2. *Rafa^ca* (raised) is also used of Jesus in 4:158 and of Muhammad in 94:4. In the former, God raised Jesus to Himself - interpreted to mean that He was taken to heaven to avoid crucifixion. In the latter, Muhammad has *dhikr* (remembrance) raised for him, which is taken to mean that his name will be held in much honour.
3. Reza Khan relates Muhammad's meeting with Idrīs on the Mirāj in his comment here, which implies a high status given in heaven.
4. See on "Enoch" in the Encyclopaedia Judaica, which suggests that this later treatment may be a response to Christians viewing Enoch as a type of Christ in His conquest of death.
5. See Wenham p127 and Westermann p258 for details.
6. The similar phrase "walk before God" is what God called Abraham to (Gen 17v1; see also Gen 24v40, 48v15, 2 Kings 20v3, Psalm 56v13, 116v9). Commentators generally suppose this inferior to the full walk with God.

3.4.6 Babel, Nimrod and the origin of languages.

It is not easy to find a Qur'anic parallel with the Babel story. There are three possibilities:

1. Surah 16, Nahl:26 is the leading contender:

Those before them did also plot (against God's way): But God took their structures from their foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above; and the Wrath seized them from directions they did not perceive.

However, although G. Awad (Encyclopaedia of Islam on Bābil) quotes writers who identify the building with the tower of Babel, my chosen commentators are not so sure.

Yusuf Ali, Azad and Maududi see the building as metaphorical, and referring generally to structures which are set up by ungodly people and collapse at the command of God. They do not mention Babel.

Usmani gives the more literal translation of "building", but his note interprets this as "castles of device and mischief" built by other nations before the time of Muhammad.

Reza Khan gives a translation that refers to a building (chunā'ī), but sees the primary meaning as God defeating people with their own plans. However, he goes on to say that some say that the story refers to Namrūd son of Kan^cān, the king at the time of Abraham, who is identified with the Biblical Nimrod. He is said to have built a high tower in Bābil, with the intention of reaching the sky and attacking the heavenly beings. God sent a storm which knocked down the tower, killing the people.

It is, then, by no means clear that this verse is a Qur'anic parallel to the Babel story, but it is an account of how God judges a wicked generation, and can therefore give a point of comparison whatever its referent.

2. Nimrod has often been identified with the building of Babel. He appears in Gen 10v8-12 in a tantalisingly brief description that has provoked imaginative comment through the ages. The text describes his exploits but gives little indication of whether they were bad or

good. A clue lies in his name, which can be translated "we shall rebel"¹. Together with the mention of Babylon in 10v10, this has traditionally led to seeing him as a mighty king who led people to rebel against God, and who was possibly responsible for Babel (See Zlotowitz p317-20 and Calvin p316-8).

Although he is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an, Namrūd is well known in Islamic stories as the great king who defied Abraham and tried to fight God. Our commentators identify him as the opposer of Abraham in 2:258, and as the one who put Abraham in the fire in 21:68-71². Reza Khan and Usmani on the former elaborate on Namrūd's arrogant claim to equal God in the control of life and death.

Qisās Al-Anbiyya', the book of stories of the prophets, expands further to include a number of accounts that illustrate Namrūd's opposition to God and His prophet. For example, he is even said to have engineered a device that enabled him to fly upwards to challenge heaven - a box with pieces of meat tied to high poles attached to its corners, and powered by vultures also tied to the box but unable to reach the meat towards which they flew. There are clear parallels here with the Babel enterprise.

The Qur'an relates God's response to Namrūd:

In 2:258, he is confounded by the prophet's arguments.

In 21:69-70 and 37:97-8, he is foiled by God's making the fire cool and thus saving Abraham. Further, it is said that whilst he plotted against Abraham, God "made them the ones most humiliated" (37) and "made them the ones that lost most" (21). Both Usmani and Yusuf Ali comment that their plans rebounded on them - perhaps an echo of the building against God which destroyed its builders.

3. Another possible parallel can be found by considering the Babel story as about the origin of languages. The Qur'an has the following:

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know. 30:22

This simply points out the variations in human beings. None of the commentators suggests any story attached to this verse, all focussing on the wonder of such variety arising from a single pair of parents. There is no idea of language differences being a mark of God's judgement. The verse is then more closely parallel to Genesis 10 which records the spread of people and development of languages without mention of a moral dimension, and with the implication that this is all part of God's blessing.

A. Similarities

A.1 People defy God.

Both the Qur'anic building story and the Namrūd stories focus on arrogance and defiance of God. In the building story, the defiance is described in one word, *makara*. Yusuf Ali translates it "plot", but the basic meaning is to deceive or double-cross. Thus Azad has "devised their own stratagem" and Usmani "they had betrayed", which he interprets as "misleading the people and degrading the message of truth" (N38). It might be, then, as much a cheating of the prophets and the people as a direct plotting against God. However, in Qur'anic thinking a rejection of the messenger is also a defiance of God. For the builders of the tower, hell will be "the abode of the arrogant" (16:29).

The Genesis Babel story makes the same point, but less directly. It shows people staying together rather than filling the earth, and seeking to make a name for themselves rather than to worship God. Their decisions have no reference to Him. However, the idea of the tower "reaching heaven" implies a religious dimension to the enterprise. It is not clear what is meant by this phrase, but Genesis presents it as sacrilege. It is, perhaps, a human effort to become like God, not unlike that of Eve in chapter 3 (see 3v5). It might also refer to the actual main temple in Babylon, "the house with the raised head" (Wenham, p239).

Whatever the intention of the Genesis writer - and there may be several - it is clear that the people are bent on building their own lives in their own way. Even religion is what they build rather than

what God asks, and is centred on their own achievements rather than on God. Whether, then, it is direct confrontation with God, rejection of His messengers and distortion of His truth or human enterprise with no reference to Him, the basic problem in each case is arrogant defiance of God.

A.2 God sees their plans.

The Qur'an names God as the Knower of what people do in 16:28, and the Namrūd stories also imply that he was aware of the needs of His prophet. The mention of judgement also reminds of the futility of hiding anything from God. Genesis gives a vivid picture of God not only seeing but coming down to look at the tower. Perhaps the intention is to emphasise the smallness of the tower that was supposed to reach to heaven.

A.3 Opposition to God is futile

Both Qur'an and Bible have God foiling the plans of wicked people - by bringing the tower down, by giving Abraham arguments, by making the fire cool, or by confusing and scattering. The Qur'anic building story adds the shame and confusion of the rebels on the day of judgement, and their eventual end in hell.

Genesis underlines the motif of futility by similar sounding words and reversals of meaning which make the passage a mockery of the building enterprise. For example, the final "That is why it was called Babel" (v9) carries this idea. The Babylonians' understanding of the meaning of the name was "gate of God" (Wenham p 241), but the story has it meaning "mixed up" or "confused".

What human beings see as a step towards the divine Genesis sees as puny and ineffective. So small is the tower that, far from reaching up to heaven, God has to come down to see it. Where they have said, "Come let us bake, come let us build" (*hābhāh nilbenāh, hābhāh nibhēneh*), God says, "Come let us confuse" (*hābhāh nābhelāh*). Whatever their designs, God is able to match them and to turn them to His own purposes.

B. Differences

B.1 Judgement

In both Qur'an and Bible, opposition to God is judged. In both cases, the judgement is "poetic": the rebels' actions are turned back on themselves. The Qur'an has the builders of the tower killed by the tower, the one who wanted to refute Abraham's message finding his own argument refuted and the one who wanted to destroy Abraham in the fire doomed to the fires of hell (29:25). In the traditional Namrūd stories, God sends his armies against the one who tries to fight Him. The pattern is that of the destruction of unbelievers, as in the story of Noah.

In Genesis, the destruction of the flood has been declared unrepeatable, so we await with interest God's response to the new wicked generation. We find that He turns their plans back on them. They plan to stay in one place: He scatters them. They plan to work together: He confuses them. They plan to build a tower: He stops them. They try to reach heaven: He comes down. However, unlike the Qur'anic story, He does not destroy them. They are confused and scattered, but not killed. It seems that God is pushing them to what they should have done in the first place, and filling the earth by "scattering them abroad over the face of the whole earth" (v9). Further, He is limiting potential evil by confusing language and preventing mutual understanding (v6-7).

B.2 Limits on human wickedness.

In the Qur'an, God limits what people can do in opposing Him. He allows the building, but not its completion. He allows Namrūd to oppose Abraham, but not to kill him. We saw from the Adam stories that Satan's activity is permitted but limited. Here, we see that opposition to a prophet will not go unchecked, but that, as in the case of Noah, God will deliver him.

Gen 11v6-7 specifies limitation of wickedness as a purpose of God's actions. As in the Qur'an, the limitation is achieved by divine intervention, but here God effects a permanent change in society rather than an immediate change in circumstances. Wickedness is

henceforth limited by of the intrinsic nature of human beings, rather than by direct divine action or imposition of laws.

The change is necessary because, if human beings work together, "nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them." Whilst Qur'an and Bible agree on the futility of opposing God, Genesis sees human beings as having a remarkable capacity for spoiling His world³.

B.3 The God who comes down.

Genesis repeats the idea of God coming down to see the tower and to confuse and scatter the people: the Qur'an has no such idea. This is not surprising given the Qur'anic insistence on the distance between the human and the divine.

Genesis has already had the picture of God walking in the Garden looking for Adam and Eve, and of both Enoch and Noah walking with God. This was a picture of fellowship, while the coming down picture is one of judgement (as in 18v21, where God "goes down" to see Sodom and Gommorrah.)

B.4 Language differences

While the Qur'an points to different human languages as a wonder of creation, Genesis sees them as having two sides. In chapter 10, they are part of God's providential ordering of society (see 3.4.7 below) but chapter 11 sees them as part of the world gone wrong. Further, it sees them as the result of God's merciful judgement on that world.

C. How does the Qur'an use the stories?

The building story is an illustration of the futility of opposing God. It comes in a passage warning of judgement for those who arrogantly reject the message of the Muhammad and dismiss it as ancient stories (16:24).

Namrud is an archetypal opponent of God through his implacable opposition to Abraham. In particular, Baqarah 258 is one of a sequence of stories and parables that follow the *āyat ul-kursī*, the verse of the throne, which speaks of God as the Living, the Self-

subsisting, the Eternal, the Most High and the Supreme. The stories establish these attributes, particularly God's power over life and death, and stand as a warning against disputing them and an encouragement to the prophet and the faithful.

D. Aspects of the Genesis story highlighted by the comparison

Given the lack of direct parallel in the Qur'an, the main question raised is why Genesis includes it at all.

As with the other stories, Babel is part of the Genesis account of beginnings. It follows chapter 10 with its positive view of peoples and languages, giving an alternative, more negative view. This might be seen as inconsistent and contradictory, but the two views can also be seen as giving two sides of one reality, and showing positive and negative aspects of human differences⁴.

As following the Noah story with the flood and the covenant, Babel underlines both the continuation of wickedness and the divine commitment to the human race. As personal wickedness continues in the family of Noah, so group wickedness continues at Babel. The re-made world has not improved humankind. However, God's judgement is, as He has promised, limited, and is designed to make the continuation of the human race possible without wholesale destruction.

The specific reference to Babel makes this the only story in Genesis 1-11 with an identifiable geographical location. As such, it appears as a deliberate criticism of Babylonian society and religion, and of the highest human achievements of its age. It puts all human culture into perspective as negligible beside God and futile unless centred in Him.

As the last story in the lead-in to Abraham, Babel sets the scene for his call. Together with the table of nations, it describes the peoples who God plans to bless (12v3) and their need. The Qur'an links Abraham with Namrūd and therefore with Babylon. Ur, which Abraham leaves with his father in 11v31, is in the southern part of Babylonia, so it seems that Genesis makes this link too. The picture, perhaps, is

one of generations of confusion following Babel, after which Abraham comes out of Babel at the call of God.

Finally, the Babel story introduces Babylon, which is to recur throughout the Biblical canon as an "embodiment of human pride and godlessness that must attract the judgement of Almighty God" (Wenham p245).

E. Summary of issues

E.1 Defiance

Is defiance of God direct rejection or something more subtle? The Qur'an is clear that the building is a stratagem against God. This is not so clear in the Genesis narrative. In fact, it does not specify what the people were doing wrong - the defiance of God has to be inferred from His response to them.

Further, the Qur'an links defiance of God with defiance of His messenger so strongly as to almost equate the two, while Genesis has no messengers. This is parallel to the Noah stories, where the Qur'an focusses on Noah's rejection as a prophet but Genesis has no apparent prophetic function for Noah. With both Namrūd and the people of Noah, the effect of the prophet is to divide people into believers and unbelievers, and the latter are judged: the Genesis Babel story concerns the judgement of the whole of humanity, just as the call of Abraham will signal blessing for all peoples.

E.1 How does God judge in this life?

Are we to expect Him to destroy His enemies, or only to limit the amount of evil that they can do? In particular, how should we interpret the existence of wickedness in our society, how should we pray about it, and how should we deal with those responsible for it?

From the Qur'an, we might expect some divine justice to be seen in this life⁵. From Genesis, we have God's promise not to destroy, and His putting that promise into practice at Babel. We can therefore expect that human beings will not be able to cause total disaster, and that wrong plans will often be sabotaged because of division and

misunderstanding. However, God is unlikely to intervene to stop them altogether.

E.2 How should we respond to language differences?

Since both Genesis and the Qur'an recognise the providential nature of languages, we should appreciate their richness and beauty. On the other hand, the Babel perception of languages as preventing mutual understanding means that we need to work on learning them from each other.

One might ask whether this is going against the judgement of God, and might lead to just the working together against him that the Babel story condemns. However, the reversal of Babel in Acts 2 suggests that one of the purposes of the coming of the Holy Spirit is to break down barriers of understanding, as the motif of unity in the New Testament (e.g. John 17v21-3, Eph 1v11, 2v15-16) shows the scattering reversed in Jesus Christ. Revelation also pictures people from all language groups united in one song of worship in heaven (Rev 7v9-10). Babel as the climax of pre-history foreshadows the coming of the Spirit as the climax of Jesus' ministry and the multi-cultural gathering and worship of heaven as the climax of history.

Notes on 3.4.6

1. For a discussion of possible origins of the name see Wenham p222.
2. This story also appears in 29:24 and 37:97-8.
3. This echoes 3v22, where the decision to bar re-entry to Eden is accompanied by the observation that "the man has now become like one of us".
4. See Wenham p242-6 for further discussion of this.
5. Maududi discusses this in N50 on the Surah 7 Noah story, asking, "Why do such catastrophic incidents not take place in our own time?" He concludes that immediate catastrophes are only for nations that have heard a prophet first hand. However, punishments continue to occur today: the problem is that we seldom recognise them as such.

3.4.7 Genealogies and the Table of Nations

Genesis 1-11 is not just a string of stories: it is a genealogical table into which stories are interpolated¹. The importance of the genealogies is indicated by the repeated thôl^edhôth formula in 2v4, 5v1, 6v9, 10v1, 11v10 and 11v27, which continues to appear elsewhere in Genesis (25v12, 25v19, 36v1, 37v2)². The word is variously translated "generations" (A.V., R.S.V.), "account" (N.I.V.), "origin" (2v4) or "genealogy" (5v1) (Westermann). Wenham has "history" or "family history".

What is clear is first that "These are the thôl^edhôth" marks the boundary between units, and is therefore indicative of structure. Secondly, the word is derived from the root yldh, meaning "to bear" or "to beget". We can conclude that, while the Genesis usage suggests that the word applies to accounts or stories, it points to the fact that these are part of a genealogical history. The lists in chapters 4, 5, 10 and 11 are not intrusions into the stories, but intrinsic to the account. We might even say that the stories are intrusions into the genealogical lists.

Before exploring the significance of the genealogies, we need to ask whether there is any Qur'anic parallel. The simple answer is that there is none. There are no genealogical lists in the Qur'an, and the Table of Nations is not only unparalleled in the Qur'an and elsewhere in the Bible but also, according to Wenham (p242), unique in world literature.

This does not mean that the genealogies are unknown or without interest for the commentators³. Reza Khan is familiar with the parentage of a number of Qur'anic figures, and often gives genealogical information that concurs with that in Genesis (see 3.4.5). Tabari's History includes extensive genealogical details⁴. However, the Qur'anic stories are without genealogies, perhaps because they are more important as illustration than as history (see D in 2.4.1).

Although the Qur'an does not have genealogies, it does have other lists of people. These are the lists of prophets (e.g. 4:163, 6:84-6)

and passages that use such lists as a structure into which stories are inserted (e.g. 11:25-123, 21:51-93). They illustrate the continuity of God's message and the patterns of prophetic experience and human response. While the Genesis characters find their place in genealogies, the Qur'anic characters find their place in the history of prophecy. Thus while the New Testament introduces Jesus through His forebears (Matt 1), the Qur'an characterises Muhammad as the seal of the prophets (33:40).

Qur'an and Bible have, then, different views of sacred history. For the Qur'an, God's interaction with human history is through a pattern of prophetic intervention. The Bible is less predictable. The genealogical approach to history suggests a working through families and relationships, and this is confirmed by the Old Testament's comprising a kaleidoscope of literature from a particular related group.

A paradigmatic picture is that of the people saved in the ark. The Qur'an has the prophet and the believers: Genesis has an individual and his family. The Genesis choice is enigmatic (see A.5 in 3.4.3), and it is the choice of a group related by blood rather than by belief.

The contrast with the Qur'an provokes the question, What is the significance of the Genesis lists?

First, this is the way that Genesis presents its history. The history of peoples is not only what they do, but how they relate. Similarly, the history of nations in Genesis 10 is not their politics but their relatedness and the development of their cultures. In particular, it is their relatedness to God and to the people of Israel.

Second, they imply the importance of recognising individuals in the context of their family histories. The Table of Nations further suggests the importance of their contexts in "clans, languages, territories and nations".

Third, they underline the relatedness of the human race. Each individual and group is related to every other individual and group.

This is particularly evident in the Table of Nations, which insists that all are descended from Ham, Shem and Japheth, and therefore part of one family no matter how divided by cursing and confused by Babel.

Fourth, they suggest God's providential ordering. The rhythms and patterns of numbers present an ordered whole. This is particularly evident in the multiples of seven in the Table of Nations (See Zlotowitz on this chapter). Even the intrusion of the arrogant Nimrod at the centre of Genesis 10 cannot detract from this.

Fifth, all this points to the continuation of families and the development of nations as part of God's blessing to humankind. The unconditional blessing of 1v28 is evident in the increase of chapters 4 and 5 despite the expulsion of chapter 3 and the murder of chapter 4. The blessing is restated in 9v7 despite the continued sin recognised in 8v21 and seen in 9v18-25 and 11v1-9; and between the accounts of sin is the outworking of the blessing in the increase of chapter 10.

Finally, the genealogical structure leads in two directions: to the peoples and nations of chapter 10 and to Abraham in chapter 11. They thus indicate that Genesis 1-11 is an introduction to both the world of nations and the story of Abraham, and raise the expectation that the two are to be linked as the story unfolds.

In summary, not only do the lists of people provide structure for Genesis 1-11: they also postulate human relatedness as the framework of the world. They then act as the source of the family of Abraham.

Notes on 3.4.7

1. See Westermann p6ff for an extensive account of the genealogical structures.
2. See Thomas 1987 and Wiseman 1977 for two very different approaches to the significance of this formula.
3. In the context of the Joseph stories, Abdel Haleem (1990) says that Muslim readers do not need information about Israel's ancestors. If they wish to know, they can look in the history books: the Qur'an is about the prophets.
4. See for example on Enoch, vol I p344ff.

3.5 Reflection in Community

Perhaps the most important aspect of this study is that it has been done in the context of a specific locality and ministry, which has provided the motivation and acted as the major hermeneutic key. There are difficulties both in reporting and in analysing this (see also in 1.3.3). The researcher cannot be aware of every interaction between thought and context; and there are too many to allow for complete reporting even should considerations of confidentiality permit.

What follows is a selection of reflections permitted by these limitations. They indicate how the "data" of 3.4 has provoked the exposition of 3.6. The arrangement is in roughly chronological order. It is introduced by some thoughts on the plight of women in Elswick, and ends with a personal reflection on questions raised by the holocaust.

3.5.1 Eve and the plight of women

"How did we ever get into this mess?" asks Al-Hibri (1982) in the title of her paper about "Islamic herstory". She and others¹ insist that the fault is not in the Qur'an but in its interpreters, particularly in the context of the patriarchal structures of the early Islamic centuries. The story of Eve used by many Muslims to justify negative attitudes to women² is not even in the Qur'an!

It is, however, in the Bible. Even here, as I have suggested in 3.4.4, it is arguably not the Genesis text but the misuse of it that leads to oppression. An increasing number of writers show that the story itself is liberating for women when read without patriarchal eyes³.

The problem of oppressive hermeneutics is, then, common to Christianity and Islam. In the context of Bangladesh, Barton (1992) observes that problems are also common to Hindus and Buddhists (p9-13). Women of every religion are liable to marriage without consultation, domination by husbands and mothers-in-law, separation from their own mothers, lack of rights, hard manual labour, frequent child-bearing and blame if anything goes wrong.

If anybody is asked, Why is (she) so badly treated? The answer would be, she is after all a woman, she is created to remain under

the authority of a husband and to serve.

p13

Barton continues:

People from the Biblical tradition do quote from Genesis stories to justify maltreatment of women. We women who have deep love for the Bible and for our faith, and at the same time love for our suffering sisters, have no choice but to discover the redeeming good news for women in our own scriptures. ibid.

This she proceeds to do, mostly from Genesis 1-3.

Rather than looking further at Barton's treatment of these passages or at the discussion of mutuality and equality in 3.4.4, I propose here to ask how Genesis 1-11 can help provide a response to Al-Hibri's question, "How did we get into this mess?" The mess is, it seems, common to us all: if we can discover its root, we may find pointers to clearing it up.

Bhachu (1993) warns against the tendency of western sociologists to focus on the patriarchal oppression/purdah/constraints of Muslim cultures and therefore to caricature Muslim women as powerless and passive⁴. She points out the variations in Muslim cultures (see also in E of 3.2.2), and shows that many women function as "cultural entrepreneurs" (p113) as they become part of their locality as well as their communities of origin. Unfortunately, some of the variations amongst Muslim women in Elswick will be obscured because of the need to avoid discussions of specifics that might break confidences.

Particular problems⁵ of Muslim women in Elswick are reported in Iqbal 1992. They include

Education and language:

I can't speak any English and I can't read or write in Urdu. There are a lot of things that you want to do but because of not having education in any languages you have to rely on your husband to do them for you. p6

Cultural and religious identity:

The Muslim society is so strict towards the girls. Not that I don't agree with it but they do try and put them down all their lives. I understand the reasons. The biggest one is if the girl goes out with a boy it's really shameful for the parents and the community and her future marriage can be badly affected. p11

My children are quite European although they are brown. If they go back to Bangladesh it would be extremely difficult for them to settle in that culture. I don't know what identity we have right at this moment. p15.

Family tensions:

There are differences but there are a lot of compensations that we lose out on here. Nobody would ever say they are lonely there, whereas here we all feel it at times. p17

My husband is very dominating as well. There are a lot of things he doesn't allow me to do and I have to put up with it. p17

My husband is very good about me going to the women's group or going to friends' houses. He doesn't stop me like a lot of husbands do but my mother-in-law doesn't like me going out to any of these things because she is very strict and she thinks women should stay in the home. p18

Some of the problems expressed are inevitable results of relating to a second culture, but others are gender related. These include concerns about female dependency, male control, and role assignment. Such problems are also experienced by white women in Elswick, but in different ways.

The reader of Genesis will not be surprised at the common predicament of women, for it teaches that life has gone wrong for women. Their oppression is part of human life after the fall. In that it is a result of the fall, however, it is not good or right. It can sometimes, perhaps, be seen as limiting the effects of wickedness, but not as the way things ought to be. The effects of sin on the life of women can be seen first in relationships after eating the fruit, and then in Eve's sentence.

A. After eating

The man and the woman were together involved in eating the forbidden fruit: the immediate result was a breakdown in their relationship. In place of openness came shame and hiding their bodies from one another. In place of trust and working together came blame of the woman by the man⁶. Both these are characteristic of the lot of Elswick women.

Good marriage relationships are rare. In the white community, the commitment of marriage is itself not the norm⁷, partners living

together in serial monogamy being more common. Often, the father is absent from the home: for a child to be living in the same house as both parents is the exception rather than the rule⁸.

In the Asian community, almost everyone gets married, and divorce and separation are relatively rare. However, as Elswick caters for the poorer members of the community, it is a place to which several women who have had to leave their husbands have come. Although there are some happy marriage relationships, there are others where there appears to be little communication between the partners and the wife is subject to her husband's demands. Further, despite religious prohibition, alcohol and gambling can be as problematic for Muslims as for others; and in all cases I have observed locally it is the husband who is caught up in them but the wife and children who have to bear most of the consequences.

All the foregoing can be true of white marriages. However, one reason for lack of mutuality in Asian marriages is the understanding of marriage on which they are built. Whereas the Genesis order is that the man should leave his family and give precedence to his wife, Islamic custom is generally that the wife should leave her family and join her husband's⁹. There is also traditional teaching that the mother-son bond should be stronger than any other. A well known *hadīth* states:

A man came to the Holy Prophet and asked: Messenger of Allah, which of all the people is best entitled to kind treatment and good companionship from me? He answered: Your mother. The man asked: And after her? He said: Your mother. And after her? He said: Your mother. And after her? Your father.

Bukhari and Muslim, quoted in Khan 1975 no. 318

While there are positive results of this, especially in the care of the elderly, it can lead to a young wife's being isolated within her own home: much can depend on the attitude of her mother-in-law.

Further, the husband-wife relationship is seldom perceived as friendship. Marriage is a contract between two families rather than a covenant between two people. While the Qur'an lays out the rights and responsibilities of both partners (e.g. 4, Nisā': 19, 34, 128-9), they

do not necessarily involve the unity of mind and spirit as well as body envisaged in Genesis 2v23-4.

Of course, expectations of marriage are determined by culture and personality as well as by religion¹⁰, and many of the younger Muslims have absorbed some western views. These can produce tensions, especially if not reciprocated by their spouses. In Elswick, it is still common for parents to seek spouses in their countries of origin. This can produce not only clashes in understanding but also extended separation while the immigration department turns its slow wheels¹¹.

The blaming of women is also characteristic of both white and Asian communities. Although most of the white community organisations are run by women, and they are usually the ones who stay with their children and bring them up, it is not uncommon to find the blame for a child's behaviour laid on the mother. This is particularly so if the mother is single, despite the fact that it is the father who is absent¹².

In the Asian communities, any straying of husband or children is likely to be blamed on the wife. The idea seems to be that, if she were a good wife, her husband would not go astray. If her husband divorces her, the assumption is likely to be that it was her fault. If she leaves him, for whatever reason, she is in danger of being labelled "bad", with unpleasant results for both herself and her children if they remain with her. Sadly, women who themselves suffer from domestic violence may join in blaming their sisters¹³.

B. The woman's sentence

Genesis 3v16 signals problems for women in childbearing and in relation to men. It is, perhaps, necessary to point out again that these problems are not prescriptive but descriptive. It is not a command that women should be oppressed but a description of their predicament (see C.2 in 3.4.4).

As childbearer, the woman is to suffer pain. In the Muslim communities, and especially amongst the Bangladeshis, women are

expected to have many children and husbands are often opposed to contraception. They may perceive this opposition as Islamic, although this is by no means agreed by the religious authorities¹⁴. Whatever the basis, the result is that women may be pushed into deceiving their husbands. Others are worn out with bearing and caring for children from an early age¹⁵, and the census figures show very large proportions of children in the Muslim communities (see Fig 2 of 3.2.2).

White women are also subject to labour pains, and some become mothers in their teens. However, it is arguable that the responsibility of child care, often in the father's absence, gives them purpose and motivation that many of the young men lack. Campbell (1993) argues that this is one of the reasons why criminal activity is almost entirely a male phenomenon.

In relation to men, Gen 3v16 teaches that women will suffer dependence and domination. This is seen particularly in Bangladeshi families, and rather less so amongst Pakistanis. While some women in both communities are the dominant powers in their households, this does not generally happen until they become mothers-in-law. Where it does happen earlier, it may be because the husband is absent or inadequate, and the wife or daughter is forced to take on much of his traditional role. This latter is also a frequent occurrence in white families.

Dependency of women is inscribed into the local Bangladeshi culture. Traditionally, they are not expected to be active outside their homes, and are dependent on men for finances and negotiations with the outside world. Typically, a bride leaves her parental home and lives with her husband's family, where she is expected to prove herself in cooking and other chores. She has little opportunity to go out until she becomes a mother herself. All her activities must be approved by her husband, and usually also by her mother-in-law. Pakistani families follow a similar pattern, but the women are usually more assertive and active outside the home¹⁶.

The patterns described are generalisations, and there are many exceptions. However, women are usually dependent on male relatives. The absence of a husband due to death or an extended visit to the country of origin¹⁷ can leave them helpless or dependent on neighbours or children if there are no other responsible male relatives. More seriously, the alternative of separation from an abusive husband becomes unthinkable, not only because of the resultant stigma but also because of inability to cope.

The combination of dependency and blame can lead to low self-image. A woman subject to a drinking or gambling husband who is struggling to do his jobs and told that she is to blame can soon come to believe it, and sink into depression and despair. Again, this can be true in any culture.

Domination is the corollary of dependence. While some husbands are sensitive and respectful towards their wives, others enjoy their power over them¹⁸. Some claim that Islam gives them the right to demand obedience of their wives and punish them if they do not comply¹⁹. Their physical strength combined with their position as "husband" makes it difficult for the wife to do anything but submit.

Genesis teaches that this is not particular to Islam, but a shared human predicament. Non-Muslim as well as Muslim women are subjected to blame, dependence and domination: the problems are not due to religion as such, but to sin. Religious and social systems are merely instruments of sinfulness. However, Muslim women in Elswick often have heightened difficulties because of culture; and their cultures are at least perceived as Islamic. In addition, many have been dis-located into a cultural context which they experience as alien and hostile, and in which coping mechanisms from their original culture are inadequate. As discussed in 3.5.3, such dis-location is in itself problematic.

Women may find life particularly difficult because of the differences between expectations of them at home and in the wider British community, as well as the problems of adjusting to different ways of

washing, dressing, cooking, cleaning and looking after children. The cultural and environmental differences between home and school, village and town, Pakistan or Bangladesh and England add to the plight of local Muslim women. The great challenge to the communities is to re-build identity in their new context (See Nielsen 1987, Eade 1990).

Despite all the difficulties described above, it is largely the women who are the main carriers of culture and faith²⁰, and on whom this responsibility will rest. Women may be dominated and dependent, but Genesis also teaches that men cannot manage without them (2v18). That all women in Elswick should be able to fulfil their purposes in both family and community is of the first importance.

Genesis identifies the problems and therefore suggests how they can be dealt with. The **blame** problem can be dealt with as both men and women recognise responsibility rightly, and receive forgiveness from God and each other. The **domination** problem can be dealt with only as relationships between men and women are put right and men recognise that they are not the gods of their wives. The **dependency** problem requires women to understand their dignity and potential as made in the image of God, and to learn to depend on Him alone. None of this will be easy, but without it our area will continue to produce people deprived of security in their relationships and peace in their homes.

Notes on 3.5.1

1. For example, Ahmed 1992, Mernissi 1991, Hassan 1991.
2. E.g. Kashful Mahjub, p353, and see discussion in Smith and Haddad 1982.
3. Examples in the bibliography include Otwell 1972, Tribble 1978, Evans 1983, Daly 1985, Barton 1992 and Dennis 1994.
4. For a similar complaint from Newcastle, see Ahmad and

Raychaudhuri 1990 p51-4.

5. There are also positive comments: life is not all problems, and not all women in Elswick are unhappy!

6. And of the snake by the woman. She was not to blame for the man's sin, but neither was she lacking in guilt herself.

7. These are personal observations: figures are hard to obtain. An indication of the unpopularity of marriage is that there have been only 3 weddings at St Paul's church in the period 1990-4, two being those of the vicar's daughters. In 1984, there were 10 weddings.

8. Again, this is difficult to quantify. The City Challenge figures give 22.8% of children living in single adult households (Fig 4 of 3.2.2), and approximately 20% of babies baptised at St Paul's have no father's name in the register. The St Paul's School catchment area has 637 households with dependent children and 216 lone parents, all but 9 of the latter being women (See Survey Report 1994).

9. This is similar to the family structures found in the rest of Genesis.

10. For a comparison of marriage expectation between two different Muslim communities in the same area of London see Summerfield 1993.

11. Noreen Hussain in Ahmad and Raychaudhuri 1990 (p51-3) offers thoughts on the selection of spouses from a Muslim woman in West Newcastle.

12. As observed in N8 above, 207 of the 216 lone parents in the St Paul's School catchment area are female. See also Campbell's (1993) analysis, especially part IV.

13. The problems are particularly acute for Bangladeshi women (see Summerfield 1993). Even here, there are exceptions: women who resist any community labelling of "bad" and "good" and seek to respond with compassion and understanding.

14. Musallam 1983 compares positive Islamic and negative Christian attitudes to birth control through the Middle Ages. 'Abd al-'Ati 1977 (p211-4) asserts that Islam permits birth control, but Maududi 1948 is of the opposite opinion.

15. Bangladeshi girls are usually married within a year of leaving school at 16, although some are allowed to continue in education. Many of the women who were brought up in Bangladesh married earlier. The present generation of Pakistani girls marry somewhat later, and several in the locality have gone on to further or higher education.

16. Fig 3 of 3.2.2 shows 25.4% of Pakistani women over 16 to be economically active, compared to 17.8% of Bangladeshi women and 43.8% of white women. But note that the Tyneside Womens Employment Project found that 90% of Bangladeshi women interviewed want paid work (See E in 3.2.1).

17. For example, to bury a parent or to visit a second wife.

18. See for example Parveen's story in Breaking the Silence 1984, p10-11.

19. This is a (mis)interpretation of Surah 4:34. It is parallel to Christian uses of, for example, 1 Pet 2v18-3v10 or Eph 5v21 to urge women to submit to abuse by their husbands. See Alsdurf and Alsdurf 1990, chapter 6.

20. Shaw (1988) has shown that religious practice for Pakistanis in Oxford was quiescent until the arrival of women.

3.5.2 Noah and the riots

On September 11th 1991, I was accompanying two Muslim girls home. We had to stop some distance from their home on the Elswick Road - the Dodds Arms was ablaze, there were several hundred young people on the streets, and the police had closed off the road. Newcastle was in the media that night!

The following morning, amidst telephone calls and visitors, I sat down with the vicar for our weekly staff meeting. He switched on the telephone answering machine, and we decided to devote ourselves to study and prayer. We had come in the course of our studies to Genesis 8v18, and so found ourselves considering God's response to evil in the context of what we felt to be an eruption of it in our area.

We found two alternatives. In Gen 6v5 and 8v21, the problem is the same - the evil inclination of the human heart. Yet God's response is different - in the first case, He is grieved and sends the flood. In the second, He is pleased and declares the covenant. The difference is the sacrifice.

The significance of the sacrifice came over to me in this context more powerfully than through any or all of the discussions of the commentators: it is God's alternative to the flood. He could, as many people were advocating, punish the wrongdoers - sweep them off to perdition, and let the "decent" people get on with their lives. That would be a right way of dealing with their wickedness, but it is not the way He chooses.

Certainly, Genesis 9 and 11 show us His ways of limiting the effects of evil while the wicked are preserved - fear, accountability, punishment and confusion. But even for those who have thrown off all these constraints, God continues to choose the sacrifice rather than immediate destruction.

So, when it came to my turn to preach, at the harvest festival, I turned again to Genesis 8, where the promise of preservation is in terms of seed time and harvest (See sermon 2 in Appendix II). In my

own studies of Noah, I was looking outside Genesis and had come to 2 Peter 2. This I studied with my assistants, who had just moved into the area and were seeing its lawlessness, and together we recognised the parallels between the false teachers of the time and many of the people of our own area.

I started my sermon, then, with reflections on this passage - especially on those who delight to be overtly wicked, not caring who sees them. This was particularly relevant to the congregation, as one mother had had her car window smashed and her handbag stolen while sitting in the car with her six year old daughter at the school gates that week. I went on to consider how, as 2 Peter 2 affirms, God is well able to punish the wicked and to preserve the righteous. Indeed, at first sight it looks as if that is what the flood story is all about.

The Qur'anic flood stories give just this picture. They are frequently put alongside the stories of 'Ad, Thamud and Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of God saving the righteous and judging the ungodly. We even find Nūḥ praying for salvation for himself and destruction for his opponents - a popular suggestion on how to deal with the rioters.

A return to Genesis shows a different picture. The Biblical Noah asks for nothing. The flood is a sovereign act of God in judgement, as the acceptance of the sacrifice is a sovereign act of God in mercy, and there is no indication of how Noah felt. Further, far from being one of a number of similar judgements, the flood is unrepeatable. Back to 2 Peter, and we find that God is holding the judgement. It is not that He cannot judge now, or that He will never judge, but that He is waiting. Why? To give us opportunity for repentance (3v9) - to accept the sacrifice.

Throughout these cogitations, I was listening to Muslim women who were sharing with me various hurts - fear of the riots, sexual abuse, domestic violence, war in the home country, mental illness in the family . . . The understanding I was gaining of wickedness and how God deals with it enabled me to share some of their struggles.

First, they had agonised questions about what God was doing. Why does He not judge? Why are the racists still active, the husbands still drinking, the tyrants still in power? I was able to help towards an understanding of what it means to live in a fallen world, towards seeing God's compassion not only for them but also for those who had wronged them, and towards seeing the need to forgive. God's promise of preservation did not overlook human wickedness, but was given in acceptance of it and perhaps even because of it (See also B in 3.5.4).

Questions were also being raised by the riots (See 2.5.2). One of the local clergy was saying, "These people are wicked!", while the Archbishop was saying, "This is linked with deprivation." Once again Genesis gives the clue. In the complex situation of Genesis 3, both humans try to shift blame - the man onto the woman and the woman onto the tempter. God's response insists on each taking the blame for their own sin.

In the case of the riots, the same principle applies. Those who committed crimes were personally responsible, but those who put them into a position vulnerable to temptation must also bear responsibility. This includes most of us - for the temptations are rooted in broken families, lack of Bible teaching, economic problems, communal powerlessness and the flaunting of material wealth as well as in a society that fails in applying the constraints of accountability introduced in Genesis 9.

Our vicar clarified this in a sermon on Matthew 18, about youngsters being caused to sin. Personal responsibility is such that, even at the cost of a limb, we are expected to resist temptation, but there is also judgement on the one who causes the temptation. The sermon also considered the idea of deprivation causing sin, and pointed to David and Ahab as examples of rich, powerful people who sinned because they thought they were deprived - of Bathsheba and of Naboth's vineyard. The feelings of deprivation experienced by Cain when his sacrifice was rejected, and by Eve when she was denied the fruit of the tree were also explored.

In amongst all this is the question for the church: how can we be Jesus' people in this mixed up world? Trying to reach a Biblical understanding is part of our contribution, but that understanding includes the centrality of the sacrifice. We believe that the cross is God's way of dealing with wickedness, and we must both live by it and point others to it.

For me in this situation, living by the cross has meant sharing in the pain of the area, and of the individuals in it. It has meant lying awake praying for God's mercy, calling the fire engines, visiting the frightened and offering hospitality to the vulnerable. It has also meant pointing out responsibility - writing to the council, supporting the police, and challenging some of the youngsters. Pointing others to the cross is more difficult, since Muslims do not like it, but I think that I have gone some way in the interactions mentioned above, by bringing its insights into the life situations of those I know, by praying for them, and by introducing some of them to parts of the Bible that speak into their particular needs.

3.5.3 The Table of Nations and the Open Letter

In November 1991, an Open Letter to the leadership of the Church of England was sent to all incumbents and was published in the church press¹. It was a call to acknowledge the uniqueness of Christ as saviour, to sensitive evangelism of people of all faiths, and to avoidance of "inter-faith" worship. Although I agree with all this - with the proviso that what was meant by inter-faith worship was not really explained - I found myself deeply distressed by the letter.

The letter itself contained several pointers to my distress, but more disturbing was the accompanying material which seemed to me to indicate more fear than love. Also disturbing was the list of signatories, that showed that there had been virtually no consultation with black or Asian Christians, with converts from other faiths, or with Christians working amongst people of other faiths. Despite statements about the wish to love and cooperate with people of other faiths, and the deploring of racism and nationalism which the letter contained, I felt that part of its message was, "We don't like these people. They're spoiling our nice pure Christian society." For me personally, this raised the communal memories of the holocaust, which was why - I eventually realised - it upset me so much.

No doubt the signatories would be horrified to think that they were saying any such thing: they do want to love people of other faiths. However, Christians as well as others suffer from unacknowledged fears of people that are "different", and need to deal with them.

It was in the midst of the circulation of the Letter that we came to Genesis 10 in our staff meetings at St Paul's, and I responded with joy to its inclusiveness.

Affirmation. The table includes peoples and cultures in the Genesis account of the world, and presents them as part of God's blessing and ordering of creation. However problematic we might find each other's cultures, God likes their variety. The "clans and languages, territories and nations" refrain of Gen 10v5, 20 and 31 recurs in Rev 5v9, 7v14, 10v11, 11v9, 13v7 and 14v6², and all the nations are

represented in 21v24-22v2. God's concern is for people of all backgrounds, and He looks forward to enjoying our multi-cultural variety in heaven. If God Himself affirms our ethnicity in both creation and redemption, then each of us can have our place in both His kingdom and the United Kingdom.

Ambiguity. The story of the flood is followed by three accounts of the nations: Noah's cursing and blessing that divides them, the table of nations that presents them as part of God's providence, and the Babel story of scattering and confusion. The centrality of chapter 10 suggests a chiasmic form with the nations as focus. However, the divisions of 9v25-7, the misunderstanding following Babel and Nimrod at the centre of chapter 10 all show that the sinfulness acknowledged in 8v21 applies to peoples as well as to individuals. There is, then, a negative side of ethnicity. We can expect fear, strife and misunderstanding between groups: each culture has marks of fallenness as well as of the image of God.

Abraham. It is to a multi-national and multi-cultural world that Abraham is called. The people of the Abrahamic covenant are placed among the nations and called for the sake of the nations: all these nations are related, and all are under the Noachic covenant. If the consummation of the Abrahamic blessing is in Christ (Gal 3v8), the Gospel entrusted to Christian believers is for all.

The Open Letter, then, was correct in its assumptions that all peoples are sinful and that all should be called to Christ. What was missing was an overt affirmation of variety and awareness of the ambiguity of western Christianity. The whole enterprise was lacking understanding of the people to whom it referred, and of the implications of the histories of their interactions with "Christendom".

It is a fact that the vast majority of people of other faiths in Britain, and of Muslims in particular, are of different cultures and races than the host population. This means that Christians need not only to consider how we respond to, say, Muslims, but also how we respond to, say, Pakistanis. In any particular person/family/community, the

two are intrinsically linked. They are not the same, but it is difficult to comment on the one without being heard to comment on the other.

As I reflected on this in the context of the Open Letter, I determined to encourage my evangelical colleagues to think of people of all cultures and faiths in the light of the positives as well as the negatives of Genesis 10 (see 3.7.2). Chapman 1992 p9-10 discusses the Open Letter, which he sees as positive in its insistence on purity of worship but sadly lacking in scope and understanding. He finishes:

The group working on evangelism at the Anglican Evangelical Assembly at High Leigh in May '92 was led by people who are living and working among different ethnic communities in Britain, and helped participants to see what is involved in Christian ministry among them. I came away from their plenary sessions with the feeling that while the Open Letter is rather like a referee or spectators drawing attention to an infringement of the rules, this group were acting like a coach, teaching us how to play. p10

I had the privilege of writing the discussion and report papers³ and presenting the plenary sessions for this group, and their presentation was informed by my interaction with Genesis 10.

Contemporaneous with struggles over the Open Letter were family events which led to an increased understanding of the importance of genealogical and ethnic inheritance for me personally as well as for the peoples of Elswick. I found myself pushed into recognising my Jewish and Czech identity - particularly the former - and the table of nations and the genealogies became part of my personal anchorage through the changes in self-perception. The changing perspective on myself is profoundly affecting my ministry, particularly in the areas of fighting racism and urging forgiveness (see Glaser 1994).

The personal identity struggle has also led to an appreciation of some of the identity questions of others in Elswick. If Genesis is careful to place people in families, nations, cultures and territories, then these locations must matter. In Elswick, both Asians and whites suffer from insecurity in many of these areas.

Most of the white people are Geordies who have lived in Elswick for several generations. However, many families are disrupted, and

unemployment has not only made people insecure in their functions but also produced rapid cultural change. Many young people feel alienated from society, and that the nation to which they belong has no room for them. There are also some people who have moved here from elsewhere. Some have come because of family breakdown, and some as they have been released from prison or left long-term care.

Asians have different problems. Most are secure in family relationships, but have had to move geographically and to leave much of their extended family. They have challenges of language and culture, and have to suffer attacks on their ethnicity through the racism they encounter. Perhaps the most acute problems are faced by those who have family problems added to those of culture and language. The stresses can lead to anti-social behaviour or even mental illness⁴.

The Genesis genealogies, then, point to a diagnosis of the deprivations of the area. They suggest that, important though economic considerations may be, ambiguities of family and ethnic relations are more significant.

When I started the study of Genesis 1-11, I would never have guessed that the nations and genealogies might have the greatest affect on me personally, or that they might provide a central message for the churches and for Elswick. I have now come to appreciate why the Genesis writer uses them as the main structure for his message!

Notes on 3.5.3

1. Published by the Open Letter Group, c/o P.O. Box 448, London SW19 6SD.
2. The "territories" are omitted in Revelation, perhaps because they are no longer relevant.
3. p14-19 of the AEA conference report, 1992.
4. My observation is that mild depressive illness is quite common amongst Bangladeshi women who are separated from their mothers, depending on the attitudes of their husbands and in-laws. Life is particularly hard for those few who have then separated from their husbands, especially if the husband has custody of some of the children. See also 3.5.1.

3.5.4 Mortality and Murder

In September 1992, I returned from holiday to the news that Mr Miah was in a coma. A week previously, white youths had attacked four Bangladeshi men on the Jubilee Estate. The others had escaped, but not Mr Miah: he died three weeks later without regaining consciousness. I knew his family, and was much involved in the nightmare following the attack. This is the context for my reflection on mortality and murder.

A. Mortality

Why do people die? Several local children have asked me this. Mr Miah's asked it in a different form: Why does God send people to earth for some time and then take them away? I answered with the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, following Gen 2v17's: "You shall surely die." Yet I am aware that the Qur'an's answer is rather different from the Bible's.

Gen 2v17 suggests that death is judgement on disobedience. Thus, although death does not immediately follow the eating of the fruit, nor even the pronouncement of the consequences, the series of deaths in chapter 5 can be seen as part of the world gone wrong.

The first death is a murder that results from wrong relationships. Cain's relationship with God goes wrong, and this leads to jealousy against his brother. Thus the first death is the result of the sin of the killer - as Mr Miah's death was the result of the wrong actions of his attackers. The puzzle is that, although we can see a link between sin and death, it is not the sinner but the victim that dies. Although Cain was afraid of being killed, God guarded him and his death is not recorded.

The next death mentioned is in Lamech's boast (2v23). This takes the spiral of relationships-gone-wrong up another step to vengeance killing. The victim takes on the role of judge, and punishes the wrong-doer. Perhaps he knows the 2v17 verdict that sin is punishable by death, and is dissatisfied with God's forbearance in not, apparently, carrying it out.

The pattern of death then sets in. Genesis 5 is unique amongst Biblical genealogies in its repeated "and he died". Elsewhere, this is unnecessary - of course he died! Perhaps the writer is emphasising the extraordinary fact of death. Adam escaped death in chapters 3 and 4, but not for ever. Despite his long life, eventually . . . he died. Although Seth was a new beginning, and although^{he}_λ called on the name of the Lord, and although he lived nearly as long as Adam . . . he died. And so it continues. Despite the blessing of new generations, one after another, people die.

Eventually, as sin worsens in chapter 6, death comes to all creation. The repetitions in 7v21-23 underline the total destruction. Every living thing perished. It is not surprising that Paul concludes, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 3v23). The extraordinary thing is that, in the next case of widespread sin, people are not put to death but confused and scattered.

The Qur'anic picture is rather different. Following their mistake and repentance, Adam and Eve are sent to earth, where they are to remain for a time and then return to paradise. Life is a test period, which naturally ends with the return to judgement which happens through death. Death is part of the human pattern and not an enemy.

Excursus on Enoch¹

Enoch, who didn't die, appears in the midst of those who did. Why? Enoch is a sign of hope. Without him, there is no hint of life beyond death in Gen 1-11. Enoch shows that there is something beyond this life, and gives a glimpse of possible resurrection².

Death is not necessary. The corollary of 2v17 would appear to be that, without sin there would be no death. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they avoided walking with Him and they died. When Enoch did walk with God, he did not die. There is, it seems, an alternative to death. One might even go so far as to say that Death is not normal. If it comes only as a result of sin, and sin is an intrusion into the good world, then it is not the norm. It is only because we are abnormal (sinful) that we die³.

Death is not nice. Because, in our experience, everyone dies, we see death as a natural phenomenon. If it is natural, some people say, it is not bad: it just has to be accepted. Similarly, many Muslims speak of death as fate or *qismah* - something which God ordains, and simply has to be accepted. Such ideas determine attitudes to grieving.

Muslim responses to bereavement in our area vary. The family is visited and supported, and a period of mourning observed. However, while most Pakistanis have overt and sometimes noisy mourning, Bahishti Zewar (p21) considers wailing wrong, and local Bangladeshis say that wailing has negative consequences for both the dead and the mourner.

Yet, if death is abnormal and a consequence of sin, it must also be nasty. Certainly, God is in control of it, but it enters the world in the ugliest way possible, through the murder of a brother. Jesus' response of anger and grief (John 11vv33, 35, 38) was surely appropriate, and the bereaved person needs to be set free to respond in a similar way.

B. Murder and vengeance

In response to the murder, a "Mr Miah Justice Campaign" was set up, its object being to see the murderer punished, to prevent further occurrences and to support Mr Miah's family ⁴. It also gave opportunity for local Asians to express anger, notably through a march and a broadsheet, Kal ki Awaz: Voice of Tomorrow. The latter lists slogans from the march (p4):

An injury to one is an injury to all! - Here to stay, here to fight!
- Is it a crime to be black? - No justice for blacks! - Sisters and brothers unite and fight! - We want justice and we want it now! - United we are strong! - Black and white unite and fight!

What might the Genesis material say into this situation?

The Cain and Abel story shows God punishing the murderer.

FIRST, God hears the cry of the victim's blood. He is aware of injustice and sin.

SECOND, it is God who punishes. There is no suggestion of the bereaved family taking vengeance, but of God administering justice.

THIRD, the punishment is less than expected. Cain expects to be killed - if not by God, by someone else - but God protects him. Far from approving vengeance killing, God will punish an avenger.

FOURTH, God hears the cry of the murderer. He is not only concerned for the innocent, but also for the guilty.

Lamech's boast shows that vengeance tends to inflict greater injury than was originally sustained. This is recorded without comment.

The Noah story has God punishing violence (6v11) by death. The post-flood covenant includes the instruction: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed . . . for in the image of God has God made man." (9v6). Murder deserves death, but it is God who calls to account (v5), and it is not grief or economic value that is the motivation but the nature of persons as made in God's image.

The principles are, then

FIRST that we look for divine justice rather than human vengeance.

SECOND that justice should be tempered with mercy.

For the victim's family, there is no duty of vengeance: for the wider society there is a duty of justice and therefore of punishment. Further, the parallel to Lamech's boast in Jesus' teaching (Matt 18v21-2) suggests that there is a duty left to the family - forgiveness.

I have reflected on this in the light of my own family's murders in the holocaust (see also 3.5.6). Experience shows that nurtured bitterness or attempts to forget cause problems not only for individuals but also for families and communities. Forgiveness is the alternative, but we need to understand what it means.

It cannot mean any denying or discounting evil. 9v6 shows that murder attacks the very image of God.

It cannot mean rubbing out memory or denying consequences.

9v5 is clear that there will be an accounting.

What it means, I suggest, is recognising that it is God who is the judge, renouncing retaliation and leaving the murderer to God.

Yet the Cain and Abel story points further, to God's concern for Cain. It points, perhaps, to Jesus' teaching about loving enemies and praying for persecutors. Forgiveness involves concern for the murderer and his or her family and community. I should rejoice when I hear of Nazis who repented, and pray for those who have their parents' misdeeds on their conscience. And I should encourage victims of violence and harassment to pray for the perpetrators and have compassion on their families.

Certainly, it was right that Mr Miah's murderer should be brought to justice by society. Certainly, we should push for the exposure and punishment of evil. The question is whether this is done out of compassion and concern for righteousness or out of hatred and desire for vengeance. Here, perhaps, lies one of the greatest challenges to Christian response, and here lay the great challenge to Mr Miah's family.

There are Qur'anic parallels, but they arise in different ways from the Cain and Abel murder story. The victim's refusal to do wrong to the murderer might be seen as parallel to the Christian imperative to respond in love. However, as a Muslim participant in a group discussing the story pointed out, there is a question as to what right response might be. He commented, "We do not believe in turning the other cheek", and the commentators insist on the right to self-defence.

Further, the story's context of rivalry between Jews and Muslims means that the legislation following it is mainly about opposition to Islam. Murder is seen as against the whole community, legislation about compensation for the victim's family coming elsewhere (Surah 2v178-9).

Because Mr Miah's was a racist murder, it was felt as a community attack, as perhaps it was. But British law dealt with it on an individual basis, and neither the murderer nor his family was required to make compensation to either community or family. It is the wider community in the shape of social services and criminal damages that is given such responsibility.

However, the family found the conviction of the murderer a help towards closure of their grief, and towards feeling that justice had been done. By the grace of God, some were able to look with compassion on the murderer's family; and they kindly gave permission to me to write this piece, with the prayer that it might aid understanding and prevent future tragedy.

Notes on 3.5.4

1. See also sermon 1 in Appendix II.
2. The Qur'anic Adam story does not need this. It includes spiritual powers, places the garden in heaven, and states that human beings have the possibility of returning. Anyway, the stories come in the context of much teaching about the after-life.
3. The question as to whether there would have been physical death had Adam not sinned is the wrong one: Genesis describes the world as it is, and gives little clue as to what it might have been.
4. They managed to speed the family's rehousing, and effectively used the situation to focus attention on racial tensions in the area.

3.5.5 Cain and Abel and Racism

An Indian Christian said to me, "We've had problems with racism since Babel." A public meeting at the Mill Lane Youth Centre (25.7.93) revealed something of the frustration, fear and anger on both sides of the black-white divide in Elswick. The Genesis stories have much to contribute to the diagnosis of the problems, as well as some pointers to ways forward.

A. Diagnosis

A.1 Lack of understanding

My Indian friend's observation was about the confusion and scattering following Babel. The confusion meant that people no longer understood each other, and the scattering that they developed their own world-views in different places. Since they were no longer using their ambition to work together against God, they used it to work against each other. In Elswick, the scattering has been reversed: people who used to live apart are now living together. But they have brought with them their own cultures, and still do not understand each other.

Gen 11v7 literally says that they would not be able to hear or listen to each other's language. Language is part of the problem, but even those who share a language may not be able to really hear each other. We may understand the words, but listening to what life looks like from another's point of view is more difficult. This means that both sides can continue to shout, becoming increasingly frustrated that the other does not seem to be listening, and increasingly unable to hear what the other is saying.

This was illustrated by the public meeting. It was called by the Anti Racism Action Group in response to increased racial harassment. All speakers were to be Asian except for one white councillor. It was, however, attended by some white people (mostly women) from the Bentinck Estate. Not surprisingly, they objected to being unrepresented, and insisted on putting their side. However, it left me wondering whether either side had really heard the other.

A.2 Looking for someone to blame

The meeting ended with a delegation of black and white people being sent to air grievances with the police, who were not present. The only alternative to blacks blaming whites and whites blaming blacks was to look for a scapegoat. The police were not the only candidates - there were also suggestions that it was the fault of the system, and that people were being manipulated into fighting other races instead of the authorities.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve also try to shift blame. Both speak the truth - Eve did give Adam the fruit, and the serpent did deceive Eve - but God accepts neither excuse. That someone else is also to blame in no way exonerates wrong actions. Similarly, that most of the refurbished houses on the Bentinck Estate have been given to Bangladeshis does not excuse abusive behaviour from whites; and that their families have been subject to racial abuse does not excuse abusive behaviour from Bangladeshis.

A.3 Displaced anger

Cain was rejected by God; so he took revenge on Abel. If Adam's problem was that he tried to blame someone else, Cain's was that he directed his anger against the wrong person. Of course, he was also trying to shift blame - he did not want to recognise that it was his sacrifice rather than God's judgement that was wrong. He would not even discuss his anger with the Person he was angry with - instead, he killed his brother.

One might ask why this was so. An obvious motivation is jealousy - the illogical emotion that seeks to harm the person who has what you want, even though the action will worsen your situation. Another possibility is impotence: God is infinitely stronger than Cain, so there is little that he can do ^{to} revenge himself on Him. He attacks his weaker brother instead.

Both motivations were evident in the meeting. For example, white people were angry because the council was putting more Bangladeshis onto the Bentinck Estate, and gave this as a reason for the racial

harassment there. Under this there is both mis-directed anger and illogical jealous response.

First, it was God that accepted Abel's sacrifice: Abel only offered it. Similarly, it is the housing office that is responsible for allocating houses: the Bangladeshis only apply for them. Logically, anger should be directed at the housing office and not at the Bangladeshis. In fact, it is directed at both, but revenge is only taken on the Bangladeshis.

Second, it was, we presume, Cain's own fault that his sacrifice was not accepted. Similarly, it is largely white racism that has pushed the housing office into putting so many Bangladeshis onto the Bentinck Estate. Over the last decade, it has attempted to house them elsewhere, notably on the Jubilee Estate: it was white racism that made this impossible.

Third, Cain's killing of Abel made his situation worse. Similarly, racial harassment makes the situation of the white people worse. In fact, council policy in cases of persistent harassment is that perpetrators should be evicted, which may mean yet another Bangladeshi family moving in. Further, the police and other authorities already see Elswick as a problem area, and can be unsympathetic towards its inhabitants. Racial harassment gives us a worse reputation, and makes the authorities even less likely to listen.

Fourth, God was more powerful than either Cain or Abel. Similarly, the housing office is perceived as more powerful than either Asians or whites. Arguing with it is felt to be a waste of time: it will always justify its position, and claim to be helpless because of still higher authorities. The same is perceived to be true of police and council.

Here, the parallel breaks down. God, being God, must have been right in His response to Cain. The housing officials, being human, are only struggling to respond to the situation as best they can. Like the rest of us, they are limited by lack of knowledge, by the system, and by their own weaknesses, prejudices and self-interest; and they know

it. They, like everyone else, are very limited in what they can do. We all feel helpless and can be tempted to look for scapegoats.

A.4 The spiral of revenge

The story of Cain is followed by the genealogy of his family, including Lamech. Whereas Cain was remorseful if not repentant, Lamech is proud of his actions. He has, he says, returned killing for wounding, and seems to think it right to take revenge out of all proportion to injury.

Compared to God's vengeance for the death of Abel, Lamech is making two errors. First, while God punished Cain with less than the injury he had inflicted (exile instead of death), Lamech punished his assailant with more than he had received (death instead of wounding). Second, while God had compassion on Cain, Lamech was concerned only for his own status.

These errors can set up spirals of revenge. A injures B, and B inflicts worse injury on A. So A does something even worse and feels justified in doing so. This is fuelled by both wanting to appear strong: they do not want to be accused of weakness, and feel ashamed if unable to retaliate. All this is exacerbated if anger is displaced, and vengeance taken on the family or community. The spiral then grows in numbers of people affected as well as in the seriousness of the vengeance.

Perhaps Lamech's fundamental error was to take vengeance into his own hands. God was able to avenge Abel in a way that stopped the cycle at the beginning. At a later stage in history, He gave laws that regulated and limited vengeance (Exodus 21-2). This puts retribution into the hands of representatives of the whole community.

Asians in Elswick have so far been remarkably restrained in their responses to racism, hoping that retribution will be carried out through official channels and abuse restrained. But the possibility that patience will eventually be exhausted and the spiral begin is always present.

A.5 The curse

As suggested in B.5 of 3.4.2, the curse of Gen 9v25 shows that wrong relationships between people can produce wrong relationships among their descendants, and therefore between groups. Individuals act as members of communities that carry their own histories and traditional views of others. In some cases, one group "blesses" the other - appreciates it, praises it and wishes it well - with or without the invocation of God. In some cases, one group "curses" the other - dislikes it, criticises it and wishes evil on it - also with or without the invocation of God. Observation in Elswick suggests that, although both "blessing" and "cursing" are practised by all ethnic groups, negative attitudes predominate.

B. Ways forward

B.1 The need to listen

If the underlying problem is lack of understanding, the most urgent need is to learn to listen. In Genesis, Cain did not even hear his brother's blood, as in the Qur'an he did not heed his brother's pleas.

In Elswick, there are language problems, but other differences are probably more serious. There are aspects of each culture that appear "bad" to the other. For example, white women's dress makes many Muslims dismiss them as promiscuous, while Asian traditions of extended families make white people see their homes as over-crowded and dirty. Such perceptions make listening difficult. There is much work to be done in explaining the communities to each other, but also in encouraging them to meet each other as a first stage towards listening.

B.2 The need to take responsibility

This suggests that each individual and group should start by recognising their own sin. This is difficult, and perhaps impossible without the power of God. It is difficult for those who have been victims - when someone has attacked you, it is obvious that they are in the wrong, and difficult to distinguish between right anger and wrong vindictiveness in response.

Those responsible for racist attacks may find admission of guilt even more difficult. Some feel that they have justified grievances. Others are responding to deeply ingrained prejudices, or have been brought up to believe that it is not crime but being caught that is wrong.

B.3 The need to recognise anger and impotence

Often, misdirection of anger occurs because people do not recognise what is going on inside them. They need to see what they are angry about, who they are angry with and why they feel helpless. This can be painful, especially where the helplessness is real.

In Elswick, we need to accept that sometimes the police really can't help, or that there really is little we can do to improve the situation. It takes courage and grace to face this without either despair or irrational fighting back. The Muslim and Christian understandings that God is in control can make it possible to accept our own helplessness.

B.4 The need to stop the spiral

The reason that noone avenged the killing of Abel was, perhaps, first that it was unnecessary, and second that Cain was under God's protection. Any avenger of blood could see that justice had been done. The cry for justice is the major one at any discussion of racial harassment. Feelings of anger are often provoked by the perception that things are unfair. The police, who are perceived as those who should do justice, are called but prove ineffective, so other bodies are approached. As each in turn proves unable to either stop the harassment or bring the perpetrators to justice, anger grows and the cycle of hatred can begin.

In view of the above observations on Lamech, the idea that the police should do justice is a healthy one. It recognises that vengeance should not be carried out by the victim, but should be mercifully as well as justly done by a third party. Problems arise when the third party fails.

The remedy appears simple. If only the police would deal with the perpetrators at the first incident, people would feel secure, the culprits would know that they could not "get away with it", and the system would be seen to be just! Unfortunately, the police have limited powers and the justice system makes it difficult to get convictions and demonstrably fair sentences, especially when the perpetrators are children. It is a challenge to Christian people to seek ways of remedying this.

It seems unlikely that our British system will soon be able to deal justly with all the harassment in Elswick. Meanwhile, Muslims and Christians share a perspective that can help us to cope. This is the assurance that God is the judge in Elswick just as He was the judge of Cain. We may not see His justice prevail in this life, but we certainly will in the next. This strengthens many of my Muslim friends, and enables them to stop the spiral by refraining from taking justice into their own hands.

B.5 The need to bless

God is the judge. However, He is also the one who ameliorates punishment, who accepts sacrifices and who makes covenants. He is therefore also the one who has mercy, and forgives the most unlikely people. This points to Jesus' teaching that we should not only trust God to judge our enemies, but that we should also bless them. As individuals, we need to learn to forgive. As groups, we need to learn to speak well of those who hurt us and to pray for God to bless them.

This is not easy, but I do not see any other way of breaking the spiral until justice is seen to be done; and I do not suppose that that will be possible to everyone's satisfaction before eternity.

3.5.6 The flood, the Sacrifice and Auschwitz

He was seeking God, tracking Him down. He would find Him yet. And then He won't get away so lightly as He did with Job . . .

Michael never ceased resenting Job. That Biblical rebel should never have given in. At the last moment, he should have reared up, shaken a fist, and with a resounding bellow defied that transcendent, inhuman Justice in which suffering has no weight in the balance.

Wiesel 1975, p52

Michael was a survivor of the death camps.

Job suffered bodily pain and the loss of family, and so did the Jewish victims; but the scale of the holocaust and the details of the cruelty are so vast that the sufferings of one person fade into insignificance. The extent, the horror, the sheer calculated-ness of the "Final Solution" puts it into a different category and opens new vistas of human wickedness.

It is not surprising, then, that the holocaust appears as a paradigm of wickedness, and especially of western Christian wickedness in much current writing. It is used as a warning against wrong interpretation and lack of listening, as well as a mark of modern western and Christian inadequacy.

I am not here concerned with the self-castigating guilt of contemporary western Christians. From my reading of Genesis, neither guilt nor wickedness are surprising. Not only Auschwitz and the murder of Mr Miah, but the rest of the twentieth century list of atrocities - Cambodia and Vietnam, Somalia and Sudan, the Gulag and the cultural revolution, Bosnia and Northern Ireland, Armenia, Iraq, Angola, Rwanda . . . - witness to the reality of the radical ambiguity of the world-after-the-flood. Cursing and enmity down generations (as in 9v25-7) and confusion and misunderstanding between peoples (as in 11v7-9) continue to mark the world of nations. The pre-flood problems of jealousy and murder, vengeance, violence and sexual exploitation continue to mark the post-flood world (9v21).

From human beings, then, I can but expect the horrors of Auschwitz and the distortions even of the Christian gospel that led up to it. I can even learn to forgive, because I too am part of the world, and I too have the possibility of distortion and horror and need forgiving.

My problem is not with the human perpetrators but with God. It is that of Michael: Can God get away with it? How can He allow the sin to extend itself so far? Why does He not intervene? It is the nightmare that God should allow His Christian people to stray so far as to do THAT to His Jewish people that unmakes my Jewish Christian world and threatens all meaning and security.

I have been surprised to have found the foundation of an answer in Genesis. It points to the whirlwind answer of the unexpected Messiah.

A. The image of God carries the possibility of Hitler.

The massacre of the Jewish children in Matt 2v16-18 has been an important motif in my thinking. Herod and Hitler, it seems to me, are part of the same phenomenon. Both were rulers, both were determined to keep their power, and both acted violently to get rid of people they perceived as a threat. They are part of the trend towards usurping the place of God characteristic of human beings since Adam and Eve. They fell to the temptation that the serpent put before Eve - "You shall be like God".

One of the most remarkable things about Genesis 3 is that the serpent was partly correct (see also Moberly 1988). God Himself says, "The man has become like one of us." (Genesis 3v22) This is the reason given for the banishment from the garden and from the tree of life.

Yet humans were like God from the beginning: we were made in His image and quickened by His breath, and it has always been His intention that we should be like Him in some ways. The problem is that we act without God's holiness: our motivation may be our own gain rather than the good of others or the glory of God. But this possibility is a necessary corollary of the dignity of the image. God has chosen to let us choose.

The disturbing thing is that evil is so often done in the name of religion, and that it is arguably the history of Christian anti-semitism that leads to Auschwitz. Even here, Genesis holds the clue. First, in chapter 4, it is a religious act that is turned around and used as an excuse for usurping God's place as giver and taker of life. Human beings, it seems, twist religious matters for their own purposes. God's response which should lead to repentance can be used as an excuse for misdirected anger and revenge.

At Babel too, the tower building can be interpreted as a religious act; but from the perspective of Genesis it is against God rather than for Him. As Pascal so neatly comments¹:

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction. Quoted in Tracy 1988, p86

Our surprise is, perhaps, that God should let it be so. In God's place, we should, perhaps, destroy the guilty and let the persecuted go free. We would like God to have stopped Cain and to have saved Abel. If we are honest, we would probably be more comfortable if at least God had punished Cain properly by putting him to death. But God did not do so. He let Cain go his own murderous way, and showed mercy in His judgement. Neither did He destroy the Babel generation, but confused and divided them to set limits on their evil potential. This leads to the second observation:

B God has bound Himself to humanity

Genesis 6-9 show us two alternative responses of God to wickedness. First, the problem is stated in 6v5: "The Lord saw how great men's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." How, we might wonder, did God feel about this?

We might suggest that He doesn't feel at all - He is the detached judge who acts as He pleases and does what he likes with His world.

We might expect Him to be angry, to destroy mankind and to abandon His experiment.

Genesis 6v6 gives an unexpected answer - God is not so much angry as sad. This is the key to His ways of dealing with the problem:

Solution 1: Destruction.

The first response was the flood. BUT God still chose to preserve the human race. He kept Noah and his family. Their subsequent behaviour tells us that they were by no means perfect, yet God chose to keep them. There seems to be conflict within God's actions - the destruction and the preservation - the desire to deal with evil and the desire to bless humanity. This is resolved in the second response:

Solution 2: Sacrifice.

After the flood, we read that God resolved never again to choose the way of mass destruction. He covenanted this with every living creature, and re-stated His creation blessings.

Why? Had humankind changed as a result of the flood? It certainly had not. In fact, even as God says that He will never send another flood, He re-states the problem in almost the same terms as in chapter 6:

Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.

That is, God limits His own options, and in that sense His omnipotence. He commits Himself unconditionally to the human race, in full acknowledgement that the race continues wicked. With the angels of Surah 2:30, we want to ask, "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood?" If nothing has changed, why does God not continue with the Qur'anic flood pattern of destruction of the wicked and saving the innocent?

Yet the situation is not the same as before the flood. The text tells us what "changed God's mind":

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of the clean animals and the clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

9v20

It is then God said, "Never again . . . ". There is something in the sacrifice that resolves the tension between God's concern for His

creatures and the necessity of justice. In a theology developed in the shade of Hiroshima, Kitamori (1966) calls the resolution "the pain of God"; and he finds its consummation in the cross. I can make no sense of God's response to the sacrifice if it does not point to that supreme sacrifice, which offers forgiveness and transformation even to the most wicked.

What, then, I ask myself, are the alternatives to Auschwitz - to God's allowing us the freedom to act wickedly? The second world war was, effectively, brought to an end by Hiroshima, with a destruction almost as cataclysmic as the flood. Perhaps such destruction is the only alternative to freedom: perhaps the limitations of mortality and understanding given in Genesis are the only ones compatible with the dignity of choice.

Yet God does not leave it there. With Abraham begins His plan of blessing and of Messiah. The question is, what sort of Messiah? Messianic prophecies are of two kinds: those that point to a suffering Messiah, and those that point to a Messiah who brings peace and justice. To deal with Auschwitz - or the Roman occupation of the first century A.D. - we need the latter, the defeat of the oppressors in order to free the oppressed.

From this point of view, Jesus is the wrong sort of Messiah. He is not the sort of Messiah that Peter (Mk 8v27-33) and the other disciples (Mk 10v35-45, Lk 24v20-21) wanted or expected. He is the suffering Messiah who accepts the pain of the world and awaits the repentance of even the Nazis. Eventually, He will come as the Messiah of final peace and justice, but that will signal the end of this world: the Noachic covenant lasts until then (Gen 9v22, 2 Pet 3v5-7). Meanwhile, God is waiting for us (2 Pet 3v9), and we are allowed to choose the ways of horror and distortion.

I may not like this. I may shout with Peter that this is the wrong kind of Messiah. But this, as I understand the New Testament, is what God has chosen. If the Genesis picture of a God committed to

His creatures is correct, then what He has chosen is for good even if it is not for comfort.

This I can acknowledge for two reasons. First, if all are sinners, then all would be destroyed in any righteous judgement. Neither I nor my relations that went to Auschwitz could escape. Second, the suffering Messiah is also the incarnate Word, and in Him God is not only committed to His creatures but identifying with them. The choice of the cross is not a detached leaving us to suffer, but an entering into our suffering as He carries it with us and for us. This God is not one whose greatness is in His total control, but in His self-giving love². Michael is wrong in accusing God of a justice in which "suffering has no weight in the balance".

However, he is right in seeing that the major theological question posed by the holocaust is also the major theological question of Job. It is not "Why?" - why did it happen . . . where did the evil come from . . . where was God? - but, "Is God worthy of worship? Can we still worship Him when there seems to be no evidence of His power or His goodness?"

If God is BOTH good AND omnipotent, there seem to be only two alternatives: either that He is powerful enough to have stopped it, but not good enough to have wanted to or that He is good enough to have wanted to stop it, but not powerful enough to have been able to do so. In either case, He would not be worth worshipping.

Perhaps the problem is that our idea of "goodness" is too limited. The simple scheme does not take into account the reality of sinfulness, or begin to explore how God deals with the evil that His creatures bring into His world. If my reflections are correct, God has through His omnipotence chosen to limit His powers of interference in our affairs, because in His goodness He wants to deal with our wickedness without destroying us. His ultimate weakness is in the foolishness of the cross, where He puts Himself at the mercy of His creatures. Yet this is also His ultimate good act for us, and in the end the greatest demonstration of His greatness.

So I may weep, but I continue to worship.

Notes on 3.5.6

1. I presume this is a translation of "Jamais on ne fait le mal si pleinement et si gaïement que quand on le fait par conscience." (Le Livre de Poche edition, 1972, no.895) "Conscience" is not quite "religious conviction", but the intention is similar.
2. This is one of the greatest differences in Christian and Muslim views of God. See Cragg's (1986) analysis in his chapter 2, "Theologies of Magnificat".

3.6 Results

This section offers an exposition of Genesis 1-11 in the light of the comparative study in the community context. The Biblical material is a tapestry of motifs and ideas woven into apparently simple stories, with such major themes as beginnings, the nature of God, the nature of human beings, the development of human culture, sin and judgement, crime and punishment, families and relationships, nations and languages. All these are relevant to contextual issues that have arisen during the study: I have chosen to focus on questions of human nature and identity, using the *khalīfah*/image distinction seen in the Adam stories as a hermeneutic key.

As recorded in 1.3, the initial proposal to look at the nature of God moved towards questions about human beings. Perhaps this is because our understanding of God rests on our understandings of ourselves. Perhaps we cannot think of anything except as it relates to us. Anyway, I have found myself pushed towards the idea that understanding of ourselves and our world is central in Genesis 1-11: it is also central to how we relate to others and therefore to Christian mission.

In the context of Christians and Muslims, study of the prophets and relationships with people have led to the idea that understandings of human nature are important to comparative understanding¹. In the Elswick context, questions of individual identity are also important, as the community includes people whose identity has been brought into question by cultural and religious challenges and geographical moves.

The exposition will proceed through a discussion of the setting and structures of Genesis 1-11 to a consideration of creatureliness and purpose. There follows an exploration of what has gone wrong and of God's responses to us.

3.6.1 Overview: context and structures

The comparative exercise has necessitated looking at each story in Genesis 1-11 separately. However the Bible does not present them as

disconnected stories but as part of a whole. This section considers the contexts and structures of the whole.

A. Genesis 1-11 in context

A.1 The context out of which it comes

Genesis is an ancient book, and it is necessary to understand it over against the thinking of its times. The problem is first that there is no agreement amongst scholars as to when it reached its final form (see Wenham pxlii-iv), and second that our knowledge of antiquity is limited. However, there are some ancient writings that provide parallels with and can assist our understanding of Genesis.

Thus, for example, Wenham can describe Genesis 1-11 as

a commentary, often highly critical, on ideas current in the ancient world about the natural and supernatural world. p xlvii

Cassuto, Sarna (1970) and Westermann also use ancient parallels as pointers to interpretation. The following relies on these authors.

A number of intentions of Genesis 1-11 come to light:

The affirmation of the universe as more than material

In that Genesis has stories similar to those of the ancient world, it does not reject everything in it. It agrees that the universe has an invisible dimension, and that humans have a spiritual as well as a physical nature. It also uses motifs that are familiar in its world. (see Wenham p xlviii).

The demythologising intention

Other creation and flood stories feature numbers of gods and spiritual powers, and have kings and heroes as semi-divine beings. The gods have many human characteristics, including birth, hunger, sexuality and disease, and are limited in their power. They disagree about their actions (e.g. over the flood) and receive their food from humans.

Genesis has one God, who is other than humanity. It makes no allusion to spiritual powers other than God, and has Him in total control of creation; and it is not He that depends on humans for food, but humans that receive food from Him. At the same time it puts us

into our place. On the one hand, over against the Sumerian myths in which agriculture and technology come direct from the hands of the gods (see Westermann p57-8), Genesis sees these as purely human achievements. On the other hand, far from kings or heroes being semi-divine, the giants in chapter 6 are destroyed in the flood and the builders of Babel are scattered. Thus human beings have high status and ability, but none is any more than human.

The effect of the demythologising is, then, to separate the human and the divine. It is possible to trace a theme of the disaster that comes from blurring the distinctions:

Eve (and presumably Adam) wanted to become like God.

Cain disputed God's decision.

Lamech took God's role as avenger.

The "sons of God" mated with the "daughters of men".

The people of Babel tried to build up to heaven.

When God is treated anthropomorphically, He appears as the disposer of earthly affairs, and the difference between Him and humans is underlined.

Yet man is made "in the image" of God . . .

Westermann discusses two ancient uses of the "image" idea: the biblical uses of the word to refer to idols (e.g Ez 16v17 and 23v14) and Egyptian and Babylonian references to kings as "images" of gods (p151-4). The latter gives the king superhuman status and makes him the god's representative in ruling the earth².

Westermann points out that the creation of the whole of humanity in the image of God is a different idea. The only ancient reference he finds to all humanity being in the image of a god uses physical terms and omits the "ruling" motif. Thus, although Genesis 1-11 insists on the differences between humans and God, it gives all humanity a remarkably high position. It gives no extra status to kings, and, far from making God like human beings, it tells us that God has made them in some ways like Himself.

. . . and God "comes down".

Despite the demythologising, Genesis retains the ideas of divine-human intercourse and of God visiting the earth. Although it is against humans trying to "climb up" to God, it has no such objection to God's "coming down". The commentators see this as an anthropomorphism, and thus minimise its significance. Yet there is a pattern of such "comings down" that is consummated in the incarnation. Perhaps Genesis here is hinting that, as God is free to make human beings in His image, so He is free to cross boundaries that are forbidden to us.

Thus, while acting as a radical critique of the humanised divinities and apotheosised human beings of contemporary stories, Genesis does not completely contradict their world view. It not only retains much of their stories: it also hints that they are right in their view that God and human beings have some attributes in common, and that there are times and places when they can meet. God is not plural, and He is not as they see their gods, but neither is He totally other or uninvolved in His world.

Both these ideas of "image of God" and God "coming down" were queried by Muslim friends reading Genesis: both take us to the heart of divergences between Christianity and Islam. They suggest an unthinkable similarity between creatures and Creator, and an unworthy humility in the Almighty.

The moral intent

Qualities admired in the ancient world included bravery and fighting, prowess in hunting and ability to erect wonderful buildings (Wenham p222-3). Contemporary religions practised cult prostitution and fertility rites, in which it was understood that gods had intercourse with human women (Wenham p xlix).

Over against this, Genesis sees violence and killing as sinful, and mocks human building achievements. Even Cain's city and the developing culture of his offspring are swept away in the flood. The greatest of human achievements are, it seems, worthless without

acknowledgement of God. Further, the suggestion of intercourse between divine and human beings, and of unrestrained sexuality, is viewed with horror in 6v1-7, and sexuality is put into the context of the marriage ordinance of 2v23-4.

That the focus is as much on the morality of God as on what is required of human beings is seen in the reasons for the flood. Wenham (p205) relates those given by the extra-biblical stories as the annoyance of the gods at the noise produced by the human beings, and that there were too many of them. The Noah figure was then saved because of the partiality of a particular deity. Genesis has God grieving at the spoiling of His creation rather than His own annoyance, and saving Noah not because he had chosen the right patron, but because he "walked with" the only God.

In Summary

Genesis 1-11 can be seen as establishing basic principles about the nature of God and His creatures and what He requires of them. Most of the ideas are common to Christianity and Islam, and are usually assumed as the self-evident basis of both religions. Although differences in detail indicate important differences between Muslims and Christians, the very existence of the similar stories indicates world views that grow out of a large measure of commonality.

A.2 The context of Genesis

Most of Genesis is taken up with an account of the origins of the Jewish people, through the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Genesis 1-11 is placed at the beginning of these, and can therefore be regarded as an introduction to them. Immediately, it gives the context of the call of Abraham, and tells us who he is.

The environment out of which Abraham is called

His family comes from Ur in Babylonia, which is the place of great human achievement but also of permanent dwelling, arrogant independence of God and human-centred religion. It is thence that Abraham is called to a nomadic existence of total dependence on God.

The family to which Abraham belongs

Perhaps the most striking thing about Abraham's family is that it is rather obscure. In Genesis 10, it is one amongst the many descendants of Noah, and, although Shem and Japheth are blessed by their father, there are many others of their descendants in the list. Israel has no grounds for boasting of its origins here: it is but one of many groups, distinguished only by the gift of God's promise and the responsibility of His call (see also Deut 7v7-8). However, the genealogy of Gen 11 indicates that Abraham is not only a prophetic figure but also an individual from a particular family for whom God is concerned.

The people for whom Abraham is called

God's call in 12v1-3 promises blessings to Abraham, but it also states their purpose: that he and his family should be a blessing to others. And the blessing is not for only a few, but for all the families of the earth. Genesis 9-11 describes these families - the whole human race that has come from Noah. 9 has God's determination to continue His creation blessings to all, 10 sets out the variety of humankind that is to be blessed, 11 gives the genealogy of Abraham who is himself part of humanity, and 12 tells us that blessing will come through him.

The world which needs the covenant people

Genesis 1-11 shows us a world gone wrong. 8v21 tells us that it will continue to be wrong as well as to be preserved, and the blessings covenanted in chapter 9 are for a fallen world. The call of Abraham signals God's plan of salvation which resolves the paradox.

The God who calls Abraham.

If Genesis 12-50 tells of the covenant people, 1-11 tells of the God who made the covenant. He is not a tribal or territorial deity, but the One who controls all creation.

Abraham is, of course, an important figure in the Qur'an as well as in the Bible. Genesis affirms the Islamic view that he was neither Jew nor Christian, if these are understood as members of religious systems. Rather, he was called by God for the benefit of the whole

world, and all are invited into the blessings of his family. These blessings are, however, differently understood³.

B. Structures

B.1 Creation and Fall

The Genesis 1-11 stories are generally agreed to centre around themes of creation and fall, punishment and grace. The tensions appear repeatedly:

The world was made good, but has become evil.

The man was made for the ground, but cultivates it in tears.

The man and the woman are one flesh, but their relationship is spoilt.

Human beings are like God, but are kept from the tree of life.

They are clothed by God, but they are also banished by Him.

God blesses with children, but one kills the other.

Cain is punished by exile, but he is protected.

Eve is bereaved, but she gives birth.

God blesses humanity by multiplying them, but they die.

Death is universal, but Enoch escapes.

People multiply, but they become more wicked.

God decides to destroy, but He also decides to preserve.

Noah is righteous, but he gets drunk and lies naked.

The nations are from one source, but are scattered and become enemies.

Clines (1978) has summarised the various analyses of the story patterns under three models. We follow his headings here.

1. Spread of sin/spread of grace

This sees a single creation and fall followed by a downward spiral of sin, infecting first individuals and then families, communities and nations. At the same time, it notes the blessings of descendants after Cain and Abel, the covenant and Table of Nations after the flood, and Abraham after Babel.

2. Sin/speech/(mitigation)/punishment

This sees a repeated pattern in the stories. In that each is

preceded by blessing or human progress, it can also be seen as a creation-fall-judgement pattern:

- 1-3: Basic creation, fall, expulsion.
- 4v1-16: First birth, fall into fratricide, exile.
- 4v17-7v24: Increase of humanity and culture, fall into wickedness, flood.
- 8v1-9v29: Re-making after flood, fall into drunkenness and impiety, curses.
- 10-11v9: Increase into nations, fall into arrogance and defiance, confusion and scattering.

3. Creation/uncreation/recreation

This sees the central event of the unit as the flood⁴. The chapters divide as follows:

- 1-2: Creation.
- 3-6v8: Fall - from the basic rebellion and expulsion, through fratricide, revenge and death to the wickedness of 6v5.
BUT there are the righteous Abel, Enoch and Noah.
- 6v9-7v24: Un-making
BUT 8v1 God remembers Noah
- 8v2-9v17: Re-making and re-blessing
- 9v18-11v9: Re-filling of the world and growth of the nations
BUT it is still fallen (9v18-29, 11v1-9)
- 11v10-32: This is the world that Abraham comes from.

The pivotal verse is then 8v1, where the remembrance of Noah signals the reversal of the flood and the remaking of the world. On either side of this are 6v5 and 8v21 that indicate God's alternative responses to wickedness. "Every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood" in 8v21 closely echoes the pre-flood statement of 6v5, "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time", but the latter results in destruction and the former in covenant.

While all three creation/fall patterns are in the text and provide helpful insights, this last will prove particularly useful in reflecting the concerns arising from the comparative Noah study (3.4.3) and from

the reflections about riots and holocaust in 3.5.2 and 3.5.6. Further, it points to the importance of understanding Elswick as part of the post-flood ambiguous world of nations (see 3.5.3 and sermons 3-5 of Appendix II).

B.2 Genealogies

The creation/fall structures help in reading Genesis 1-11 as an account of all humanity: each story can be seen as part of a pattern that describes the dignity and dilemma of all human beings. The genealogical structures discussed in 3.4.7 above suggest in addition the importance of individuality and relationships.

Each person is presented in the context of his or her family, and the saving of family rather than believers in the ark emphasises the importance of blood relatives. Genesis 10 adds the dimensions of people group, nation and language, and 4v2 and 20-22 that of occupation. Finally, over against the Qur'an the accounts of the giving of personal names are striking.

All this implies that people are not only defined as human but also as individuals. Family, nation, culture and occupation are all intrinsic parts of identity; but the uniqueness of the individual with his or her own name is also affirmed.

Notes on 3.6.1

1. See also 3.7.3 on Cragg's (1986) discussion of the importance of common humanity as a ground for Christian witness to Muslims.
2. Note the similarity to the *khalifah* idea, but the very different context and world-view that goes with it.
3. See Breiner 1985 and Cate 1974 for comparative studies.
4. See Wenham p204 and Brueggemann p73ff.

3.6.2 Creatures of God

A. God

The most basic assumption of both Bible and Qur'an is the existence of God. Over against contemporary attempts to define what is human in terms of entities within the physical and psychological world, both define human beings primarily in relation to Him. In doing so, they make some foundational points:

A.1 There is one God.

It is not surprising that monotheistic faiths establish the one-ness of God from the beginning, but it is interesting that they do so in different ways. The Qur'an has the story of the angels, showing that powers other than God are not to be worshipped, being actually inferior to humans. Genesis does the opposite: it establishes the uniqueness of God by omitting all other powers. In itself, it assumes that no such powers are relevant. In the context of contemporary writings, it can be seen as a polemic against polytheism (see 3.6.1).

A.2 God is the originator of almost all that occurs.

This is particularly clear in the Adam stories. In both cases, it is only during the brief scene of temptation and fall that the stage is left to the creatures. As Van der Wolde (1989) points out:

In order to be able to place Genesis 2-3, the reader has to see YHWH God as the autonomous and supremely competent subject and destinator who creates and places, commands and prohibits, examines and punishes and as such directly or indirectly determines the actions of the subject-actants. It is within this framework that the reader should interpret the actions of the other subjects. p93

For the Qur'anic passages, we would have to substitute 'guides and accepts' for 'examines and punishes', but the supremacy of God is the same.

A.3 All this implies that God is in complete control, and has the authority to command His creation and to deal with it as He wills. This unique right and ability imply universal scope: if He is the only one with these rights, then nothing can be outside His jurisdiction. Uniqueness necessarily implies universality.

It is as creatures of this God that both Muslims and Christians seek to understand themselves. We are agreed on our dependence on God for existence and sustenance, as well as on the absolute right of the Creator to command and judge the creature.

B. The crown of creation

It is not unusual to find Muslim writers criticising Christian ideas about human beings. Here is a particularly strong example:

Islam and Christianity . . . project polarized conceptions of human nature. The attitude of Christianity towards the creation of man is essentially negative, while the Islamic attitude is essentially positive. Christianity believes that man is the product of sin: he is genetically tainted, he is congenitally flawed. But Islam rejects this attitude. It believes that the creation of man is a positive achievement; he is created in the divine image.

Tahir-ul-Qadri 1987

I shall argue that Genesis does present the negative aspects of human nature, but that this has nothing to do with creation. Like the Qur'an, it sees the creation of humankind as positive.

B.1 Both see the rest of the created order as being for human beings.

Surah 2, Baqarah, puts the Adam story in this context (v29), and God's bounty in creation is a frequent Qur'anic theme¹. Genesis has the giving of food, first plants (1v29) and then animals (9v3), and describes the beauty, security and provision of Eden (2v8-14). Human beings were given not only what they needed, but also a superabundance of beauty and riches. Qur'an and Bible agree that God gives to us with great generosity, and that we are the objects of His beneficence and mercy.

B.2 Both give human beings the highest place in the hierarchy of creation.

Genesis does this through the idea of the *tselem 'elōhîm*, the "image of God". It then places humankind in the hierarchy through the concept of dominion, which includes the naming the animals. The Qur'an uses the term *khalīfah*, and places humankind in the hierarchy through

the bowing of the angels, which includes the receiving of knowledge of the names from God².

B.3 In both, the corollary of dignity is responsibility. As the world is given to them, so they are put into it to care for it. This means that they have both the privilege of choice and the responsibility of obedience.

The remarkable thing is that, in both cases, the privilege is misused, and that God allows it to be so. He chooses to delegate (Qur'an) or share (Genesis) His authority - to allow for the entrance of bloodshed and mischief (Baqarah 30) or evil and death (Gen 2v17) into His "very good" (Gen 1v31) world. This implies such a high place given to human beings that God allows His supreme control to be modified by their freedom.

This is more serious in Genesis than in the Qur'an. The notion of delegation implies retention of authority, whilst that of sharing suggests letting some of it go. The latter depends on the "image" idea - that human beings share in the essence of God in some way. It raises human status even higher, but makes the choice of disobedience more serious: the greater the autonomy, the greater the potential damage.

This is reflected in God's responses to Adam and Eve's disobedience. In the Qur'an, He calls them back to obedience and gives words that enable their return. The move from heaven to earth is part of the original plan, and therefore no disaster. In Genesis, God pronounces curses and evicts from the garden. There follows increasing disaster for future generations.

The level of human autonomy is further evidenced by pictures of God limiting human wickedness:

3v22-24: Autonomy is described as being "like one of us, knowing good and evil". It is limited by banishment from the Garden.

11v6-9: Autonomy is described by saying "nothing will be impossible for them". It is limited by confusion and scattering.

So great is the free will given to human beings here that God has relinquished the right to keep them essentially good - He has allowed the possibility of their becoming enemies not only to each other, but also to Himself and His world.

Another way of looking at this is to see that God has chosen to make His creation dependent on human beings as well as on Himself: in this sense, He has chosen to associate Himself with His creatures. We can go even further and say that God has actually made Himself dependent on humanity. He has chosen to depend on us for the right ordering of the world, and Gen 6v6 further suggests an emotional investment in humankind. Here we come to the limits of language and even concept, but God's grief and joy in His creatures is evidenced elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g. Jer 48v36ff, Hosea 11v8-9) and is characteristic of Jesus' teaching in the New (e.g. Luke 15). It is also evidenced in the common description of God as jealous - the One who will brook no rivals to the loyalty of His people.

Thus, while Tahir-ul-Qadri is right that Christianity teaches that human beings are "congenitally flawed" (see 3.6.4 below), this does not detract from its understanding of their high status. In fact, the seriousness with which sin is treated implies a status even higher than that given in Islam, since it suggests that the actions of human beings can affect not only the creation but also the Creator. Further, it implies that the current state of humanity is not its apex. Rather, we are fallen from an even higher position than that we find ourselves in. If even the best in our present predicament is part of a fallen condition, human potential is immeasurably higher than it would be if our present state were essentially good.

C. Relationship with God

We return to the question posed in 3.4.1: what is the significance of the difference between the concepts of tselem and khalīfah? The suggestion to be tested is that, since one describes nature/relationship and the other status/function, they reflect different emphases in the Qur'an and Genesis.

The above discussion affirms this possibility, and that *tselem* should be understood primarily in terms of relationship. It implies that the essential human function is carried out through relationship with God and in partnership with Him. Thus it is because of Adam's nature that he names the animals: function is secondary to nature and relationship.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, places humanity mainly by status relative to other created beings; and it is because of this status that function is defined. The status is evidenced through the giving of knowledge, which equips for carrying out the duties of *khalīfah*. Of course, this has implications about human nature and relationship with God, but these are not the primary considerations.

The question will continue with us into our explorations of the purpose of humanity and what has gone wrong.

Notes on 3.6.2

1. See for example 55, *Rahmān*, with its repeated refrain, "Which of your Lord's mercies would you deny?".
2. It is interesting that Tahir-ul-Qadri suggests that it is Muslims and not Christians who see man as made in God's image. While some Muslims reject the word "image" as *shirk*, others use it, but with a different understanding than Christians. A *ḥadīth* "God created Adam in the image of the *Rahmān*" is used by Al-Ghazzali (see Sweetman 1946, part 1, vol 2, p194, Nicholson 1964, p62), and by various groups with strong ideas of the immanence of God. Ahmed Khan (1862, p93) quotes this and 95:4 in his harmonisation of Genesis and Islam. Watt (1990, pp94-100) discusses the various versions of the *ḥadīth* and concludes that interpretations that retain the otherness of human and divine predominate.

3.6.3 People of purpose

A. Created to worship

Islam and Christianity agree that human beings are made to worship God, and that they find their greatest identity in being His people. A well-known verse in the Qur'an states this purpose of creation:

I have only created jinns and men that they may serve me. 51:56
The passage goes on to say that God needs nothing from human beings, the implication being that our service is for our benefit and not for His. The word used for "serve" is from *ʿabada*, which is also translated "worship". From it comes the noun *ʿabd*, a servant or a worshipper.

Worship is enjoined at the end of several of the Iblis stories, when it is said that worshippers (*ʿibād*) of God will not be led astray by Satan, and that he has no power over them (15:40, 23:17, 38:83). A call back to worship is then the main thrust of the message of the Qur'anic Noah:

O my people! I am to you a warner, clear and open: that you should worship (*ʿbudū*) God, fear Him and obey me. 71:2-3

The call to worship implies a call to renounce idols and recognise *tawḥīd* (unity), as is specified in 7:59, 11:26 and Reza Khan's note on this verse. It is associated with fear that implies an awed recognition of the fact of judgement, and with obedience to the prophet that implies a change of life-style. In short, the worship preached by Noah is Islam.

The Genesis stories are also concerned with worship, but do not give specific calls or instructions. Rather, aspects of submission to God can be seen in the stories.

The sabbath is instituted as part of the pattern of creation in 2v2. It is not said that the day is for worship, but that it is holy, and that this is a reflection of the activity of God. Given the significance of the sabbath elsewhere in the Bible, this makes regular worship part of the creation order, and part of the character of humanity as made in the image of God.

The sacrifices of Cain, Abel and Noah introduce another kind of worship. Again, it is without explanation, and we have seen the difficulty of determining what made a sacrifice acceptable (See 3.4.3). Further, there is no indication as to why sacrifice was chosen as a form of worship. What is clear is that right sacrifice is acceptable to God, and even that it affects the way He responds to us.

Calling on the name of the Lord began at the time of Seth (4v26). Again, it is not clear what this means or why it should have begun at that stage - the phrase seems an unnecessary interjection into the text. However, it clearly describes a human approach to God, and marks the godly line of the replacement son which included the righteous Enoch and Noah and therefore the whole of present humanity. The phrase "call on God" is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe prayer for deliverance and forgiveness¹.

The Babel story shows the opposite of worship. Far from calling on the name of the Lord, the people seek to make a name for themselves. They work on a human construction that is to reach heaven, and this is not pleasing to God. Despite its religious overtones, it seems that Babel was designed to bring glory to human beings and not to God.

Most importantly, Genesis shows human beings relating to God. On the one hand, righteousness is described as "walking with God" (5v22-4, 6v9): on the other, the severest punishment is banishment from the garden of God (3v23) or the presence of God (4v14-16). The implication is that humans are made for fellowship with their Maker.

In summary, a pattern of worship is written into our natures. This includes sacrifice and prayer, and is part of a relationship with God that is based on His initiatives and His glory, and not on our own achievement.

The Qur'an also insists on human beings as worshipping creatures. It is interpreted as requiring regular patterns of prayer, fasting, giving and pilgrimage, with sacrifice a secondary and occasional symbol of submission and thanksgiving. However, although many writers mention

relationship with God, and Sufis in particular stress love for Him, the Qur'an is without the anthropomorphic pictures of close relationship found in Genesis.

This supports the idea that function rather than relationship is the Islamic focus, and further evidence can be found in the balance of writings on worship. While both *imān* (faith) and *ʿamal* (action) are considered essential and interrelated, Sarwar (1984) gives 27 pages to beliefs and 41 to duties, and Quasem's (1983) Salvation of the Soul and Islamic Devotions gives 28 pages to "Salvation" and 224 to "Devotional Acts".

B. Created to relate

The idea of the *tselem* of God is followed immediately by the creation of male and female (Gen 1v26). That is, human nature that relates to God relates also to other human beings. To be human is neither to be identical with every other human being, nor to be self-sufficient. Being alone was the only aspect of creation that was "not good" (2v18), and Genesis 1-11 explores various aspects of human relationship.

B.1 The male-female relationship, as the first in creation, is presented as a necessary part of human essence and responsibility. Without the "helper" (2v18), man cannot fulfil his purpose; and it is necessary that the helper is fully human, of the same kind as the man himself. The relationship as it should be is described in 2v23-25:

The man recognises the woman as of the same kind as himself.

He leaves other relationships in marriage.

The relationship is so close that the two are essentially one.

There is no shame in the relationship.

V 24 is specifically about marriage. In view of the celibacy of Jesus, this does not mean that marriage is the only male-female relationship possible, but that it is a fundamental, God-ordained human relationship.

The problem is that the relationship has gone wrong. There is no mention of the man and the woman ever cooperating together in ruling the

world; in fact, the first incident recorded in their lives is one in which the woman alone deals with a creature. However, they cooperate in procreation in 4v1, and it is clear from the genealogies that they continued to do so. They had, of course, no alternative if the human race was to continue - this is underlined in the flood story, where husbands and wives as well as pairs of animals enter the ark together.

Thus male-female relationships, albeit full of tensions and distortions, continue to be a central feature of creation, and gender to be an important aspect of human identity. This is true in all communities in Elswick, but gender differences tend to appear earlier, more strongly and sometimes more healthily in the Muslim communities, perhaps because of clearer role divisions (See 3.5.1)².

B.2 Families feature strongly in Genesis, especially through its genealogical structure. Family awareness is particularly marked amongst Muslims in Elswick, and in fact *‘izzat* or family honour is one of its strongest determinants for action³.

Genesis 1-11 explores various family relationships:

Parent-child

Adam and Eve have children. This gives joy (4v1), and sorrow when they are lost (implied in 4v25). There is an intriguing description of Seth as a son "in the image" of Adam in 5v3. This can be variously interpreted, but at least it means that Seth was of the same kind as Adam - fully human, and able to relate to him. Even Cain, who went so wrong that he was cursed (4v11) is called *‘ish* (4v1): he is a man like Adam.

The parent-child relationship is again explored in 9v18-27. As usual in Genesis, the dark as well as the light side of the relationship is seen, but the story underlines the respect that children should show for parents, and the power parents have over children. It is not, then, surprising to find poor parenting identified as one of the major factors hindering child development in Elswick⁴.

Again, the idea of respect for parents is stronger in the Muslim communities than the others, although it is also very clearly taught in St Paul's Church. Muslim parents may find difficulty in disciplining their children in the Elswick context, but the ideas that children should obey, that the mother should command particular respect, and that children should look after their parents when they grow up are widely affirmed⁵.

Siblings

The final episode of the Noah story shows Shem and Japheth not only showing respect to their father, but also cooperating together in doing it. It seems that brothers, like spouses, should work together.

Cain also learnt this lesson, although in a negative way. His question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" betrays his wrong relationship in its denial of responsibility. The implication is that the brothers should care for each other; and the position of the story immediately after the expulsion from Eden suggests the importance of sibling relationships.

Because of strong family identity and extended family traditions, brothers in Muslim families may quite literally work together. It is traditional for married sons to live with their parents, and, although housing may make this difficult, the tradition continues in Elswick. If a large enough house cannot be found, brothers may live near each other. They may cooperate in business, in financial commitments, in shopping, and in caring for their families. Sisters are different. When they marry, they leave their own homes and become part of their husbands' families. Ties with their own parents and siblings therefore have to loosen (see also 3.5.1).

Genesis does not only present the "nuclear" family, but the wider network of related people, and the whole of humanity is seen as ultimately related, through the extended family saved in the ark⁶. The Muslim practice is, then, nearer to the Genesis picture than is that of most Elswick whites. This is partly because the culture in which Genesis was written was nearer to that of the Indian sub-

continent than to that of Europe, but also, I would suggest, because much of the white culture has gone seriously wrong. In particular, it is affected by an individualism that erodes perceptions of the importance of family responsibilities⁷.

In addition to personal relationships, Genesis 1-11 raises the question of relationships between groups. It tells us little about these, but describes the beginnings of "clans and languages, territories and nations" (10v5, 20, 31). These are seen as related through common ancestors, and their potential if they cooperate is implied by the Babel story.

C. Created to work

Working makes me feel alive again. I feel depressed at home.
Iqbal 1992, p32.

Both Genesis and the Qur'an show that human beings have responsibility. Whether as *khalīfah* or as image, they are to care for God's world. The Qur'an does not expand on this in the Adam stories⁸: Genesis begins its explanation in 1v28, immediately after the creating human beings:

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.
Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the ground.

There are two jobs here. First, the human race is to increase: there is the responsibility of giving birth to and bringing up children. Second, the ground and the animals are to be managed: this implies a total environmental concern. The ordinance is said to be God's blessing, and is accompanied by the giving of food.

The two-fold job of increasing the human race and caring for creation is given to male and female as a joint responsibility. In chapters 2 and 3, it seems that the roles are divided, since the Adam is put in the garden to work it and look after it, and the woman is named as mother. The "curses" further separate the roles, as the woman's lot has to do with childbearing and the man's to do with agriculture. However both responsibilities are still joint, since the man needs the

help of the woman, and the woman cannot bear children without the man. They are established in chapter 2, and the division of roles and the hardship entailed are part of the world-gone-wrong (see also 3.4.4 and 3.5.1).

The important thing is that, despite imbalance and division following the "fall", the responsibilities are still there, which means that God's blessings are not revoked. Work and child-rearing may be hard, but they are still good and need to be done. They are part of God's purpose for human beings, and therefore essential to human identity.

The Qur'an would agree, although it would describe the responsibilities in different terms and differentiate male and female roles much more strongly (see A.2 in 3.4.4). This does not necessarily mean that the woman's role has to do with rearing children and the man's with caring for creation. Both are involved in both: the separation is rather between public and private. It is the private world of home that is the woman's realm, but this can involve a variety of activities:

In my days women had to weave their own cloth . . . they farmed, looked after their flocks, milked the cows, collected eggs, took the sheep out to graze, collected wood for the fire and the cooking, dried it in the sun, collected water twice a day from the wells, took the washing down to the rivers and then climbed the hills to the forests to collect big logs to dry. Iqbal 1992, p33

In Elswick, too, Muslim women work with the earth as well as with their children. In many families, men do such public jobs as shopping as well as earning money, while women are responsible for gardening and decorating as well as for other household tasks. In contrast, traditional white families are likely to see everything to do with child-rearing and home-keeping as the woman's job, and the earning of money as the man's job. In neither case are roles fixed or universal: there are many variations, but basic expectations run deep in peoples' consciousness.

All this has implications for a situation of high unemployment. If God created people with the purpose of work, then, although we can educate people for leisure, the basic question is not how to amuse them but how to encourage meaningful, useful occupation. It is work

rather than amusement or wealth that is God's blessing for mankind and therefore what we need.

It is demonstrable that unemployment correlates with poor health and high crime rates, whatever the level of financial help available. The Scriptural diagnosis suggests one reason for this: that human beings without meaningful employment feel lost and worthless.

In Elswick, there are two urgent jobs that reflect the Genesis priorities, whether people are in paid work or not. The first has to do with human relationships and filling the earth, and the second to do with environmental relationships and dominion over the earth:

C.1 Caring for children and home. Because this is largely seen as women's work by the white community, men tend not to be involved in it, and may feel that their masculinity would be threatened if they did⁹. In Muslim families, male unemployment can be less traumatic, because men continue to have responsibility for public aspects of life¹⁰. Christians can stress that the responsibility is given jointly to men and women, and encourage white men to be involved.

On the other hand, male unemployment can bring worse financial problems for Muslim families, because there is no tradition of women going out to work and it is the male role to provide for the family. Again, the idea of joint responsibility can help.

C.2 Care of the environment. Levels of rubbish and vandalism are unpleasantly high, and many gardens are overgrown rubbish dumps. It is not unusual to find children breaking bottles on the pavements, dismantling walls, or using wooden fencing for bonfires. Regular rubbish collection and street cleaning by the council is insufficient when the litter from private property can be blown into the streets, and people begin to put their rubbish into the back lanes shortly after the week's collection.

An obvious useful occupation would be to clear the rubbish and tend gardens and public areas. The problem is that such activity can be

discouraging. For example, a "Clear up party" organised by the Triangle Residents' Association saw dozens of people clearing streets and gardens in a carnival atmosphere, but the rubbish reappeared within a few days (see A in 3.7.1).

D. Created to create

D.1 Beauty

As signalled in B.1 of 3.6.2, creation is not utilitarian: the trees in the garden were "pleasing to the eye" as well as "good for food". Zlotowitz (p 94) quotes Sforzo as explaining:

i.e. gladdening and broadening the heart to make it receptive of intelligence, as in the verse, "And it came to pass when the minstrel played that the hand of HASHEM¹¹ came upon him (1 Kings 3v15).

Beauty, then, is an essential part of God's "very good" (Gen 1v31) creation. In fact, Harries (1993, p 36) points out that the Septuagint translates *tôbh* ("good") as *kala*, which includes the idea of beauty as well as those of excellence and usefulness. As Harries argues, this beauty in creation reflects the beauty of the Creator, and implies that human beings are made to appreciate the beautiful as well as to tend it and to use it.

D.2 Creativity

We can go further: the human beings were not only to appreciate but also to till. That is, they were to be involved in the development of the garden. Adam is then told to name the animals, which implies, as argued in B.3 of 3.4.1, that he was to exercise creativity in his own right.

The beauty of creation and the creativity of human beings together imply the fitness of artistic activity. What is useful can also be made beautiful, as were the trees of Eden; and the abundance of jewels and the "good" gold of 2v12 suggest the value of things that are useful only for their beauty. Thus Vanstone (1977) as well as Harries (1993) sees the creative arts as responses to the love and beauty of God as evidenced in His beautiful creation.

D.3 "Culture"

The spread of humankind at the end of Genesis 4 is accompanied by the development of musical instruments and tools (v21-2), and is generally interpreted as signalling the rise of what Westermann calls "creative cultural progress" (p329). Thus Brueggemann (p65) sees these verses as "explicit reference . . . to the arts as legitimate and recognised enterprises". He goes on to point out that the names of all of Lamech's sons - *Yabhāl*, *Yûbhāl* and *Tûbhal-qayyin* - all derive from *yabhal*, which can mean "productive". Together with their sister *Na^cmāh* ("lovely" or "pleasant"), their names "suggest a celebration of life" (idem) despite their descent from Cain the murderer.

We can conclude that the production of music and artefacts as well as other creative activities are among the good things for which God has created human beings. Further, many creative activities are best carried out in cooperation with others, and can therefore help to develop human relationships; and they can be done for others and so be expressions of love. Most importantly, they can be used in worship, both to develop wonder in response to creation and to express heartfelt responses to God Himself¹².

This suggests again the primacy of nature and relationships. It is because of our nature as the *tselem* that we appreciate the beauty God has made, and our creativity is but a reflection of His creativity. It is then in partnership with Him that we are called to create¹³, and as an expression of relationship with Him that we offer our creations in worship.

Notes on 3.6.3

1. See Wenham pp 115-6 for the range of interpretations of this phrase.
2. For example, Muslim girls wear pretty dresses and use make-up and jewellery for special occasions from early childhood, and are

brought up to think of themselves as good-looking. Despite normal teenage anxieties, my observation is that many Muslim girls grow up with confidence in their looks and in their femininity, and that prospects of arranged marriage mean that they have no need to agonise over finding partners.

3. See Shaw 1988 for a discussion of this concept in the context of a Pakistani community in Oxford, Jeffery 1976 chapter 4 for an analysis of family relationships amongst Christian and Muslim Pakistanis in Bristol, and Mirza 1989 for reflections on its implications by young Muslim women in Bradford.

4. For example, lack of loving discipline and secure home relationships is cited by most of the respondents in the St Paul's School Development Project Report, 1994.

5. See in 3.5.1 on the mother-son bond, and Schleifer 1986 part 1. Sarwar (1984 pp 14 and 197) reminds his young readers of duty towards parents.

6. Despite the Gen 2v24 ordinance that a man should leave his parents for his wife on marriage, most of Genesis follows the opposite practice, as do most local Muslims.

7. There are also, of course, aspects of Muslim family relationships that reflect the world gone wrong - both will be explored in 3.6.4 below.

8. The commentators make up for this. See B.1 of 3.4.1..

9. Campbell (1993) argues that this is partly why men are more involved with crime than women, especially when they are unemployed and seeking expressions of masculinity and escape from boredom.

10. Particularly in the Bangladeshi community, the husband is also likely to retain control of all family finance.

11. This is how Zlotowitz vocalises *yhwh*. *Hashem* means "the Name".

12. This is true in Islam as well as Christianity, but with reservations. A few local Muslims, while appreciating such art forms as calligraphy, object to representative art. Further, while Qur'an recitation is an important art, other art forms are seldom used in worship. *Bahishti Zewar* condemns both listening to and playing musical instruments (p20) and includes the enjoyment of dance and music in its list of "grave sins which have been severely warned against" (p22-3).

13. We create only in a secondary sense, being constrained to use the material that God has provided in His creation.

3.6.4 People gone wrong

The ugliness of Elswick contrasts harshly with the beauty of Eden: for pleasant trees we have piles of rubbish, and, for worshipful creativity, pointless vandalism. As evidenced in 3.5 and pointed out in 3.6.3, something has gone wrong in every area of relationship and responsibility, and many attempts to improve matters end in disappointment.

Christianity and Islam, Qur'an and Bible, recognise such problems, but offer different diagnoses. So fundamental is this that Adams (1984) proposes it as a key to understanding the wide divergences between the two apparently similar systems, and comments:

Here, the difference is so great that one may well ask whether in truth there is any hope of Christian-Muslim dialogue ever progressing beyond the stage of registering the difference with one another. p306

Thus, for example, Maududi, uses the Adam story in Surah 2, Baqarah, to refute the idea of the "fall" (N53) and calls the teaching that there are necessary consequences of sin "one of the most misleading doctrines to have been invented by human imagination" (N52).

Such writers would recognise that these different diagnoses imply different solutions, and therefore underly the respective Islamic and Christian doctrines of prophecy and atonement. However, I shall argue that they also reflect the subtly different ideas of *khalifah* and *tselem* as fundamental descriptions of humankind. The question is whether the main problem is that we have gone wrong in our function and forfeited our status, or that we have disrupted our relationships and become distorted in our nature. This question we take to the Genesis chapters.

A. Goodness and badness

Since Genesis 3 is frequently used as a basis for a Christian diagnosis, we might turn first to the Adam stories. However, since the Qur'anic Adam is prophet as well as archetypal man, his story can have only limited value: for our commentators, prophets are in a special category and preserved from sin¹. The Cain and Abel story provides a closer parallel, and is used by Azad and Usmani as a

prototypical crime. Cain opens the door to murder and tyranny, and the story signals the division of humanity into righteous and unrighteous. Such division is repeated in the responses to Noah's preaching, and is a frequent Qur'anic theme.

The Genesis story, on the other hand, avoids such clear divisions. The unrighteous Cain is more the subject of the story than the righteous Abel. He becomes the object of the sympathy of the reader and obtains the blessing of descendants who produce a fruitful culture. In contrast, righteous Noah gets drunk and curses his son; and his descendants will be enemies of each other for many future generations.

Genesis 1-11, by its hints and omissions, subverts our thinking about good and evil and their consequences. It has people who are blessed for no evident reason, righteous people who are silent, wicked people who command our sympathy and judgements that sometimes exceed and sometimes fall short of what we might expect. At every turn, it makes us ask, "Why did that happen? Was that good or bad? What happened in this gap?"

The Qur'an, like the Midrash, seeks to provide answers. It closes the gaps by filling them from within its own system, and the commentators fill the gaps left by the Qur'an. Christian interpretation also seeks to fill gaps, but in that it, like the Midrash, retains the Genesis text, it cannot close them. On Cain and Abel, for example, the New Testament answers some of the questions (Heb 11v4, 1 Jn 3v12), by presenting a faithful Abel and a wicked Cain. However, it does not permit the conclusion that humanity is divided into bad and good. Jesus' classic retelling in Luke 15 epitomises His subversion of popular religious expectations in this area (see 3.4.2).

Genesis 3 is also read by Christians from within their system. The use of the chapter in connection with the Augustinian doctrine of original sin may lead the Christian to assume that the teaching is there - and this was my own starting point. However, Jewish insistence that there is no "original sin", and that the passages

instead deal with the evil tendency, warns that the idea may be in the reader rather than in the text.

The argument here is not about whether human beings have a tendency to do wrong: that is agreed. The question is whether we can overcome it, and if so, how. Translations of 4v7 illustrate this: both Zlotowitz ("you can conquer it") and Cassuto ("you will be able to master it") clearly imply that overcoming the evil tendency is possible through human exertion. Zlotowitz's quotation of Rambam makes this explicit: "it lies within man's power . . . " (p147). In contrast, Christian translations omit the idea of "being able" and opt for variations on "you must master it" (NIV).

Despite this being acknowledged by all concerned as one of the most difficult verses in the Old Testament, only Brueggeman among my chosen commentators debates the question of "can" or "must", and he does this through references to John Steinbeck rather than to Genesis (p58-8). The inference is that the decision about translation lies outside purely textual considerations. With this caveat, we shall now proceed to look at teaching about the world-gone-wrong in the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and Noah, and then summarise what is clear from Genesis.

B. The stories

B.1 Adam and Eve

As noted in 3.4.1, the Qur'an represents Adam and Eve as disobeying only because they were deceived, as acknowledging responsibility and repenting on reminder, and as receiving immediate forgiveness. It is not they but Iblis who is fallen, and the removal to earth is not a punishment.

In contrast, Genesis has deliberate disobedience. Whereas the Qur'anic pair are convinced that the act of eating is right when they do it, the Genesis Eve - and presumably her husband with her - is not even tempted to think this might be so. Rather, the serpent encourages them to distrust God's intentions and to doubt the truth of His

warning. Eve trusts the serpent and herself, and Adam trusts his wife; but neither trusts God.

The basic Qur'anic problem also involves listening to the wrong person, and the warnings attached to the stories suggests that this is so for all humanity and not only for Adam. However, the Qur'anic pair do not trust Iblis rather than God: they follow his suggestions because they have been convinced that these are what God wants. They follow the wrong instructions and do not break their fundamental relationship.

In Genesis, the mistrust and consequent deliberate rebellion continues in the face of God's coming and calling to account. There is neither repentance nor forgiveness. Rather, the distrust of God continues as Adam and Eve hide from Him, and the disruption of relationship that this implies is confirmed from His side by the expulsion from Eden and prevention of return. This is accompanied by disruptions in relationships between male and female, humans and animals and humans and ground.

If the singular '*adam*' in 3v22-4 represents the whole of humanity, the expulsion and disruptions describe our common human condition. Qur'an and Bible agree that we now live outside Eden. For the Qur'an, this means living on earth rather than in heaven. This was God's intention from the start, and a return to Eden is envisaged after death for those who are successful at the judgement. Meanwhile, the earth is a battlefield, because Iblis has been allowed a measure of freedom until the Last Day. Many people listen to him rather than to God, and that is why there is so much wickedness and crime.

In Genesis, Eden was on earth, and the expulsion signals an earth that is no longer as it was: environment as well as human beings are changed. Where the Qur'an has the disobedience forgiven without further consequences for sinners or for God's plans, Genesis has an apparently small rebellion having universal negative results. This is perhaps because, while the Qur'an sees a malfunction that can be

corrected without loss of status, Genesis sees a wrong relationship that distorts human nature.

B.2 Cain and Abel

In both Genesis and the Qur'an, Adam and Eve share a common nature and a common predicament. With Cain and Abel, there is a division between the accepted and the rejected, the victim and the criminal, the innocent and the guilty.

It is important that this division does not come between a man and a woman but between brothers. That they are peers, and that the Genesis story comes before the division of the world into nations implies that jealousy and murder can occur between persons of any kind and from any group: it is a common human condition, and the accepted/rejected division can come between any two persons who are otherwise apparently the same².

How, then, does the Genesis division occur? The focus on the interaction between Cain and God (see B.6 of 3.4.2) and the *khalīfah/tselem* distinction together suggest Cain's relationship with God as the key to the story. Since Cain and Abel are born outside Eden and therefore share in their parents' condition of disrupted relationships, the acceptance of Abel and his sacrifice implies a healing of his relationship with God, while Cain's rejection leaves him in his original state of exile. God then offers Cain another chance of putting the relationship right, but he rejects it, and the continuing wrong relationship with God results in the wrong relationship with his brother.

The consequent calling to account and sentencing results in remorse, but Cain is no more ready to admit his responsibilities and repent than were his parents. He therefore represents a continuation of the disruption of relationship with God that leads to disruption of relationship first with his brother through his own choice and then with the land through God's judgement. However, he continues to share something of God's protection and blessing as descendants are

born and flourish: his jealous nature and refusal to repent cannot remove God's care for him.

B.3 Noah

The Qur'anic Noah story gives the prophetic pattern of sin, rescue and judgement that is epitomised in the life of Muhammad. People have gone wrong because they have forgotten God's message through Adam, so Noah is sent to call them back. His preaching again divides the community into the "good" who accept him and the "bad" who reject him.

The Genesis version is different in both balance and detail. Wickedness is not related to response to a prophet and, although the story highlights the fact of human wickedness, it gives little attention to its dynamic or to the righteousness of those saved. Rather, the flood is a unique event that divides history, so that our world-gone-wrong is described as a post-flood world.

The post-flood world is characterised by ambiguity: by the covenant of God in the face of human wickedness, and by the blessing of God in the midst of fear and bloodshed, impiety and cursing, arrogance and confusion. In particular, it is a world of nations and peoples that are characterised by ambiguity not only within but also between groups. That God's covenant includes all peoples is indicated by the table of nations which relates all peoples as descendants of Noah. However, Noah's curse and the Babel confusion signal that relationships between groups as well as between individuals will continue to be wrong: racism is an expected result of the human predicament, although not a right one³.

C. What is clear from Genesis?

Jews, Christians and Muslims agree that something has gone wrong with the world: patterns of sin and punishment are not at issue. The questions to which Christianity gives a distinctive answer are rather:

Is sin transmitted through the generations, and if so, how?

To what extent does sin affect us and the world?

Is it possible for us to overcome our tendency to sin?

Must sin always have negative consequences?

As noted above, interpreters of Genesis give various answers to these questions, depending on their prior commitments. For example, Syed Ahmed Khan (1862) interprets it according to his Islamic understanding of sin. Here, I shall explore what seems to me to be clear from the Genesis text in the light of the comparative and contextual study.

C.1 While the details of how sin is transmitted are not given⁴, it is clear that sin continues to infect the human race. No new start produces a people without evil: the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and Noah and the flood are followed by the death toll of chapter 5, Lamech's viciousness, the impiety of Noah's sons and the building of Babel.

Both infection and responsibility are universal. Righteous Noah gets drunk and curses, and Adam and Eve try to shift blame. The implication is that all have evil tendencies, but none likes to admit it. It is not surprising if Islam, as the "natural" religion (*dīn ul-fitr*) denies the universal fallenness of humanity; but the primeval attempt at self-justification should make us beware of anything that tempts us to deny our own sin.

Further, the tendency to sin is now part of human nature. With the insistence on the goodness of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, this implies that we have gone wrong in our nature; and the absence of spiritual forces in chapter 3 implies that this is our own fault. Jewish interpretation agrees here. Wenham (p91) notes those who, while denying that Adam's sin affects others, see it as paradigmatic. Zlotowitz (p17) goes further and agrees that there has been a change in our natures. He says that Adam was not originally the mixture of good and evil tendencies that we are:

But after the sin, man changed. The urge to sin was no longer dangled in front of him by a seductive serpent; it had become part of him.

C.2 It is not clear whether human beings could overcome their tendency to sin if they chose to do so, but it is clear that in fact they do not. The only suggestions that they can are the commandment given to Adam and the advice given to Cain. That Adam was commanded implies that he had the possibility of obedience, but this was before the fall of Genesis 3 and does not answer our question for the post-fall world. The advice to Cain is obscure, and the translation that suggests his ability to overcome depends on the translator's beliefs. All that is clear is that it would have been possible for Cain to have been accepted by God, and that he was held responsible for his murderous actions.

Whether or not they had the ability in themselves to be different, no improvement of anyone is seen in Genesis 1-11. The only possible exception is the enigmatic Enoch, who "walked with God"; but the fact that Noah's "walking with God" did not make him immune from sin prevents us from building anything on this. As far as the Genesis evidence goes, we have to conclude that people either did not or could not stop doing evil.

C.3 The consequences of sin extend to every aspect of life. Each area explored in 3.6.3 above is affected. Work becomes hard and painful and all the basic relationships go wrong. Worship too is distorted: Cain's sacrifice is unacceptable, and the enterprise of Babel, far from reaching God, is an act of rebellion against Him.

The effect of sin also reaches beyond the human world. The ground produces thorns and thistles, the whole order is disrupted by the flood, and the animals go in fear of human beings. Most vividly, human beings are expelled from Eden so that they no longer live in the ideal world with access to the tree of life.

Some of these consequences are direct judgements of God: others are the result of human activity. To what extent they are necessary results of sin is not stated. Rather, it is seen that sin has had an irreversible effect on the world, that God is the judge and that He will judge. The suggestion that He can or will forgive without

negative consequences for either Himself or the sinner is simply absent. Sin causes grief and anger to God and pain to humankind, and He will respond.

D. In summary

We live in a world gone wrong because of human rebellion against God. It is disrupted in every aspect of relationship - between humans and animals, humans and ground, men and women, sibling and sibling, nation and nation. It is marked by denial and accusation, jealousy and murder, vengeance and violence; and death is universal.

Woodberry (1989b) argues that, while Muslims seek to refute Christian diagnoses of the human predicament, the Qur'an itself comes close to teaching that we are fallen. He offers a re-reading of the Adam stories that emphasises sinfulness, quotes Kamil Hussain's suggestion that Adam is symbolic of the human condition (See Nolin 1964) and quotes several other Muslims who teach the universality of temptation and wrong desires. He then asks, "If people are basically good, how do we account for the Qur'anic quotations of most people rejecting right guidance?" (p155).

These are indeed puzzling questions for the Christian reading the Qur'an. Perhaps an answer can be found in our khalīfah/tselem distinction, with the suggestion that the Qur'anic perception is that we have not functioned correctly and that our problem is therefore a loss of status.

Usmani affirms this in his note (26) on Surah 7:32. He asks why Muslim nations are apparently lacking in worldly progress, and says that Muslims can control the world only if they "perform their duties rightly as a Vicegerent of God", which they can do only by becoming true believers. The non-Muslims who control worldly resources do so only for themselves and not on God's behalf, and will therefore lose all in the Hereafter. That is, they are not God's khalīfah. All unbelievers have forfeited the right to this status, and insofar as they seek to manage the world they are usurpers. They can be reinstated only by embracing Islam.

All this is perfectly consistent with the Qur'anic refrain that most people reject God's guidance: they choose to function in their own way rather than God's. However, it is also consistent with Islamic insistence that nothing has gone fundamentally wrong with human nature: as they have chosen to go their own way, they can also choose to accept God's message, and they will then be reinstated and function properly.

The Christian distinction is not, then, that sinful tendencies are universal or that most people rebel against God. Rather, it is that human beings as God's *tselem* were created with a nature that relates to God, and that that nature has been distorted because the relationship has been disrupted. This means that we cannot simply be reinstated: we need to be changed.

Notes on 3.6.4

1. See 2.2.1 on Muslim objections to Biblical accounts of prophets.
2. The suggestion that Cain stands for the Kennites or that the brothers stand for cultivators and shepherds is amply refuted by Westermann (p283ff) and Cassuto (Vol I p179ff).
3. It is not surprising that even these anti-racist chapters of Genesis have been used to support racism, but such writers as Bax (1983), Vorster (1983) and Felder (1991) have amply refuted such interpretations.
4. The only possible clue in Genesis 1-11 as to the means by which sin is transmitted is the reference to Seth's being born in (now sinful) Adam's image (5v3). However, since v1 has just referred to Adam's being made in God's likeness, it seems more likely that v3 implies more positive characteristics for Seth.

3.6.5 God's response to His image

Despite the fall of Adam and Eve and the exile of Cain, the litany of death in Genesis 5 is prefaced by the reminder that man was made in God's likeness and the assertion that Seth was in the likeness and image of Adam. Death and judgement do not obliterate the image, and neither does the flood. Chapter 9v6 returns to the image, and affirms the continuing value of human beings in its response to bloodshed.

This has implications about the continuing dignity of humankind despite the distortion and disruption described in 3.6.4 above. However, it also has implications about the way that God responds to us. This section suggests that His response to a creature made in His image goes beyond what might be appropriate to a khalīfah.

A. Provision

The khalīfah, as described in B.1 of 3.4.1, is placed on earth to manage and to judge as God's vicegerent. As such, he needs status, qualities, resources and knowledge. God has provided these with overflowing generosity, and promises rewards to those who carry out their responsibility.

The status provided is that of authority relative to the animals and the spiritual powers. The qualities include spiritual, moral and intellectual faculties which imply the ability to choose, to worship, to obey, to judge and to accept responsibility. All these things are, according to the Qur'an, given to human beings as part of their nature.

Needed resources include food, clothing and a pleasant environment: all these are provided in abundance. The giving of knowledge is pictured in the giving of the names, and all other necessary information about the world and how it is to be managed is given to the prophets and transmitted to those who will hear.

Genesis also sees a vicegerency function for humanity: God commissions them to have dominion in creation. In fact, before the fruits of the 'adamah are given as provision for the 'adam, the 'adam

is given as a provision for the 'a^adamah (2v5-7) As such, he is provided with the necessary resources and qualities. However, the only information given is the prohibition of the tree of knowledge, and he is expected to generate his own knowledge as he invents his own names for the animals. In this, the tselem needs less provision than the khalifah.

The Genesis 2 focus is on a different provision: as many verses are given to the provision of companionship as to the provision of environment, food and instruction. The 'ish needs the provision of the 'ishshah as the 'a^adamah needed the provision of the 'adam¹.

B. Judgement

Qur'an and Bible agree that God has abundantly provided for His creatures, but also that they misappropriate the provision, and that God judges them.

Why does God judge? Both Bible and Qur'an assume that God as Creator has the right to judge, but also that wrong deserves judgement: justice is one of the attributes of God. However, we can go further and ask why punitive action might be needed to achieve God's purposes in creation. The Noah story holds hints that differ slightly in the two Books.

In the Qur'an, the temporal destruction of the unbelievers enables the correct function of the believers. This is indicated by Noah's prayer in 71:27:

If Thou dost leave any of them, they will but mislead Thy devotees.

Maududi's note (40) on 11:36 also suggests that the wicked must be removed if the world is to function properly:

This demonstrates that when a Messenger communicates his Message to his people, they are granted respite from punishment only as long as it remains possible for the social milieu to produce a reasonable number of good people. As soon as that milieu becomes shorn of good people, and none but the iniquitous remain, then the term of respite ends. At this juncture, God's Mercy itself calls for the destruction of these incorrigible rogues lest they also contaminate others. For to show any further leniency

on them would amount to perpetrating an injustice on the whole world and on future generations.

This contrasts with God's determination to preserve the wicked in Gen 8v21. Yet He had destroyed in the flood. This points to a tension in His decision to judge, and suggests that it was not primarily to ensure right function. Rather, Gen 6v6 gives His motivation as grief and pain.

He had seen that His creation was good (*tôbh*) (1v4, 9, 12, 18, 20, 25); now the "sons of God"² see that the daughters of the 'adam are *tôbh* (the sentence structure is similar). They recognise the beauty of the image, but their response is to own and exploit rather to than welcome as had the original 'adam (2v23). It is at this stage that God determines to limit their lifespans.

The results of the wrong unions are the Nephilim. Whoever these are, they are creatures who are different from the normal children of the 'adam. The implication is that the exploitation of the image has led to a monstrous distortion. God who had seen that His creation was very good when it included the 'adam (1v31) now sees the wickedness of the 'adam has become very great (6v5). His response is to destroy; but this not only in anger but in grief.

That the grief is a share in the pain of His creation³ suggests a measure of human-divine mutuality in the *tselem* concept. God does not relate to His image as a detached observer, but as an involved person. However, God's response to the misuse of the image can be retribution as well as grief: 9v5-6 requires an accounting if the image is destroyed. The implication is that the image endows value, and perhaps signals a divine jealousy over human beings that is greater than that over the animals which are simply part of creation.

In summary, the Genesis Noah story suggests that God judges not to ensure function but to correct relationship, and that He will not tolerate His creatures' destroying His image.

C. Mercy

Nearly every surah of the Qur'an begins with the declaration that God is the Beneficent and the Merciful (*ar-raḥmān ar-raḥīm*). This is evident from all our stories: the provision for Adam and Eve, the giving of knowledge, the reminding of prohibition and the forgiveness and reinstatement are all signs of mercy. Abel's exhortation to Cain and Noah's preaching to His people are merciful opportunities for repentance, Noah's preaching includes many reminders of God's kindness, and the saving of Noah and the believers is part of His goodness.

All this is consistent with God's intention of ensuring that the *khalīfah* is enabled to carry out his function. However, His conversations with Noah add a dimension of relationship at least between God and the Prophet. There is a personal concern that goes beyond the functional.

This personal concern is at the forefront of much of the Genesis material, and, over against the Qur'an, is particularly marked in God's treatment of the convicted Cain. Even the original sinners are exiled rather than executed, and provided with skins to replace their (presumably ineffective) fig leaves. However, prophetic intervention is replaced by the coming or speaking of God Himself, in warning Cain, in calling Adam and Eve and Cain to account, and in judging Babel. The image enables and even requires personal encounter.

Genesis and the Qur'an, then, share the idea that God's mercy includes provision, communication, rescue and personal concern. However, the Genesis pictures of concern for the wicked hint at a commitment to humanity that goes far beyond that in the Qur'an.

C.1 The enigma of the righteous

The pivot of the Noah story, which is itself the centre of Genesis 1-11, is 8v1: "God remembered Noah". God's remembering of the righteous in the midst of wickedness and judgement is arguably the key to these chapters.

The Genesis Abel, Enoch and Noah appear as righteous figures in the midst of the growing wickedness of humankind. In each case, they are silent - Noah only speaks in the incident where we see him as unrighteous. In no case is it obvious why they were considered righteous: reasons for the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice have to be read into the text rather than out of it, and for Enoch and Noah the explanation is only that they "walked with God", and that Noah was righteous and blameless. There are not only questions as to what precisely is meant by these ideas, but also as to whether these qualities actually earned deliverance⁴.

If we follow Brueggeman's suggestion of seeing Noah as "the bearer of an alternative possibility" (p79), such questions become unimportant and we can rather see all three righteous figures as together signalling grace and hope. They show us that, despite all that has gone wrong, God is able to raise up people who relate to Him rightly:

The acceptance of Abel implies a reversal of the rejection of Adam and Eve in their expulsion from Eden.

The walking with God of Enoch and Noah implies a reversal of the hiding of Adam and Eve and the denials of Cain.

The righteousness and blamelessness of Noah contrast with the wickedness of his world.

Noah's obedience reverses the disobediences since Adam and Eve.

While enigmatic in themselves, then, Abel, Enoch and Noah together give assurance of God's gracious restoration of relationship and righting of human nature in the face of murder, death and judgement. The gaps concerning how the restoration and righting are achieved, from both their side and God's, indicate that God's plans are not yet evident in these chapters. However, if what has gone wrong is the distortion of the image, "righteousness" implies the image restored. God's remembrance of Noah is then a remembrance of His image, and a commitment to its salvation.

The Qur'anic stories have no need for such gaps and enigmas, since they are used to reinforce theological points made elsewhere. Thus there is no mystery about Adam and Eve's repentance, about Noah's

prophetic call or about who responded to it: they are all part of the overall Qur'anic pattern. Only the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice raises questions, but they do not appear to worry the commentators, none of whom shows sympathy with Cain's feelings of being treated unfairly.

C.2 Commitment and covenant

Noah in Genesis is a much more significant figure than either Abel or Enoch. For the latter two, reconciliation with God is, as far as the Genesis text goes, a personal matter, and both leave the earth while others live on. In contrast, Noah's righteousness leads to the continuation of the human race, and he lives on while others die.

It has been argued in 3.4.3 and 3.6.1 that the Noah story is the pivot of Genesis' primeval history. It is sometimes presented as a paradigm of judgement and sometimes as a paradigm of grace⁵. The two can be held together as God's response to His *tselem*: a commitment to preserve the image and a determination to right it. These are the commitments to love and to justice that Kitamori (1966, p21) sees as resulting in pain for a God who is involved in His creation (see also 3.5.6), and therefore as pointing to the ultimate involved pain of the cross.

Above all, the Noah story affirms God's commitment to persevere with the creatures in His image, by both preserving a group in the ark and binding Himself to their descendants for the duration of the earth. There is something about God's image that evokes this covenant response⁶.

More fundamentally, there is something in God that produces the response; for the image is His image, and is therefore about God before it is about us. The rest of the Bible can, perhaps, offer no better word than *hesedh*, *agapē*, love to describe this. A further clue is, however, found in Gen 5v1-3, where the reminder that 'adam was made in God's likeness and blessed is followed by the statement that Seth was in the image and likeness of Adam. This suggests that, as a parent passes on characteristics to a child and is then bound to the

child in love, so God is bound in love to us, who are in His image. It is this parent love that Kitamori sees as the love that takes on pain for the beloved. This is exemplified by Jer 31v20 and Hos 11 (p 19, 118-9, 159).

It is perhaps not too much to see a passionate love of God for the whole of humanity in the Noah story of which His passionate love for His Jewish children expressed in Hosea 11v8 is but a part⁷:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboim?
My heart is changed (lit. turned) within me;
all my compassion is aroused.

It is just such a heart change that comes at the centre of the Noah story⁸, as God remembers Noah (8v1) and determines to have compassion on His creatures (8v21). The turning of the flood is a picture of this turn in the heart of God. Yet this does not require us to conclude that God has changed. The covenant of chapter 9 is signalled before the flood in 6v18, and the intention to save announced at the same time as the intention to judge (6v13-21). The whole flood/covenant story shows the God who is both jealous and loving in response to His image, and does not indicate a temporal change in the character of God.

We have then, a God whose commitment to His creatures is fuelled by passionate love as well as by grief. If the passions and commitments of readers and researchers are the keys to their readings and research, then the passions and commitments of God are also keys to His perceptions of His creation. An understanding of them is then an essential hermeneutic key to these Genesis chapters.

C.3 Purpose and hope

3.6.3 asked what might be the purpose of human beings, and answered the question from our point of view. We are now in a position to ask, "What is God's purpose for us?" Our hope is that His purpose reflects His passionate commitment to us.

Qur'an and Genesis agree that the purposed role includes managing and peopling the world. Differences arise as God responds to things going wrong. If, as has been suggested, treatment depends on diagnosis, that response depends on what has gone wrong. It also depends on what God purposes.

3.6.4 argued that the Genesis diagnosis is that humans have disrupted their relationship with God and that their very nature has been distorted, whereas the Qur'anic diagnosis concerns wrong function and loss of status. For the latter, function can be rectified as people respond to prophetic reminder and warning, and God will then mercifully re-instate them. A distorted nature needs more drastic treatment.

Genesis 1-11 has few hints of what this treatment might be. We can but conclude from God's determination to persevere with humankind that He has good purposes for us. If the blessings of 9v1-7 imply that these purposes concern His image, then His prime aim is to heal the broken relationship and to right our distorted natures. That He did this in Abel, Enoch and Noah is clear, but the only suggestions of how He did it are the accepted sacrifices and the mention of grace.

Acceptance, walking with God, righteousness resulting from sacrifice and grace echo closely New Testament ideas of salvation and atonement⁹. For example, Colossians 1v21-22 holds all these ideas together:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

The hope of Genesis 1-11, then, is that God will act to restore the disrupted relationship with those made in His image. As suggested in 3.5.6, that action begins with the call of Abraham in chapter 12, for which the genealogies set the scene.

Notes on 3.6.5

1. The Qur'an also suggests this . See on 7:189 in A.2 in 3.4.4.
2. For the various interpretations of this phrase, see A.4 of 3.4.3.
3. See A.3 in 3.4.3 above.
4. See on each of these stories in 3.4.2, 3.4.3 and 3.4.5 above.
5. See for example the children's song in sermon 2 of Appendix II, where the chorus juxtaposes the destruction of all but 8 people and God's love.
6. Of course, the Noachic covenant also includes the animals, but this is not surprising as they have done nothing wrong. It is the commitment to a continuously wicked humanity that is amazing grace.
7. There is an interesting contrast here with the way that the Qur'an treats Noah's desire for his unbelieving son's salvation (11, Hūd:45-7). The commentators see his desire as natural but wrong, and in fact he asks forgiveness for it (v47). Maududi (N49) compares the wicked son to a rotten limb that must be removed, and says that, if children refuse to obey God when they grow up, "parents should realise that all their efforts have been wasted and that there is no reason for them to hold such children dear to their hearts".
8. Brueggeman (p73) proposes a change in God as a key to the Noah story. The word *yinaḥem* in Gen 6v6 can also be interpreted as suggesting a change of mind.
9. A specific reference to Jesus has traditionally been seen in the woman's seed of 3v15. (See Westermann p260-1 for a review). Westermann contends that this view is no longer accepted, and Wenham agrees that it is unlikely to have been the intention of the writer. However, the interpretation of the significance of the serpent's bruising is one of the gaps in the text, and Targums, New Testament and many Christian people fill it with the Messianic victory (Wenham p80-1).

3.7 Implications for mission

One might be forgiven for asking what Gen 1-11 has to do with mission. There is no clear missionary mandate, nor much obvious gospel: the chapters comprise mainly a sad analysis of the human condition. However, closer study reveals them as key to Christian mission through their foundational description of humanity and of God's mission to His world.

Section 3.6 has been concerned with human beings in general - our shared nature, purpose and predicament, and God's response to humanity as a whole. However, the Genesis chapters treat these general concerns through particular stories. They do not present an abstract mother, but Eve, an abstract murderer, but Cain, an abstract piety, but Noah.

Each individual is presented in the context of a genealogy and therefore of family relationships. After the flood, there is also a concern for people and language groups. The implication is that God treats us not only as similar humans, but also as members of nations, ethnic groups and families. If mission is about God's concern for His world, then it is about His response to people with individual characteristics, and not to an undifferentiated human mass.

If being in the image of God means that we are to reflect something of His character and to share in His work (see B.3 of 3.4.1), then our mission is but part of His. The question about our mission is therefore first a question about God's mission, and only then about how we are part of it.

3.7.1 God's mission to His world

Genesis 1-11 is not primarily prescriptive, but descriptive. That is, it does not give directions to follow, but a picture of God and His world. The questions that can be directed to them about mission are not, then, "How should we relate to our neighbours?" and, "What is our mission to them?" but, "Who are they and what is God's mission to them?"

God's mission includes the care of creation, the ordering of society, the preservation of living beings and blessings for all the people of the earth. It is, however, a mission to a world gone wrong - a world after the flood. It is therefore a mission of God's passion and commitment.

A. The care of creation.

God is the Creator, and humans are to care for His creation. In Elswick, we are therefore to be concerned for the environment, to fight against rubbish, to look after gardens and to care for pets and even to feed the birds. Our dimension of creativity (see D of 3.6.3) implies that we should reach beyond the essentials to beautifying our area and our homes.

This is a concern common to Christianity and Islam - and to the whole of humanity - and therefore one in which Christians and Muslims can work together. Thus, for example, it has been possible to have a local residents' association that has included people from all communities, and has been involved in environmental issues. For example:

In September 1991, the Triangle Residents' Association organised a street "Tidy Up Party". Many children and some adults were organised to spend an afternoon picking up rubbish and tidying gardens. The local police came to help, one of the city councillors contributed a clown act, and the vicar was in charge of an electric hedge trimmer. Food and entertainment were provided in the play area at the top of Kingsley Terrace, and great fun was had by all.

The question about such initiatives is their lasting effect. Within a week, the area was as untidy as ever. The residents' association was organised with the help of a council-funded community worker and myself: since she left and was not replaced, and I have changed jobs, it no longer functions. Most people find their lives demanding enough without trying to organise or motivate others!

B. The ordering of society.

God is concerned about crime and punishment, the upbringing of

children, the functioning of families and communities and the balance between male and female. These again are common concerns, and have provided opportunities for cooperation.

The prime motivation for the residents' association was not rubbish but crime; and many of the Muslims expect white people to take responsibility here since society is perceived as "ours" and the criminals are usually white. At a personal level, crime and harassment have often been the occasion for Christians to offer support to Muslim neighbours.

The residents' association also had a women's group meeting fortnightly for mutual support. We went to different peoples' homes, taught each other cooking and discussed a variety of problems. The group proved particularly attractive to the wives of overseas students who were learning to cope with the British environment, although it also involved several Bangladeshi women.

All this goes some way towards ameliorating fear and suffering, but has little effect on criminality. At the time of writing, the Triangle is relatively quiet, but the focus of crime has merely shifted elsewhere.

Children are a key concern in Elswick, first because there are so many of them: the Church Urban Fund figures show 35% of Triangle residents and 40% of Jubilee Estate residents as under 16 at the 1991 census. Figs. 1 and 2 of 3.2.2 indicate the large proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children among these.

Secondly, minors are responsible for a large proportion of crime and racial harassment. As the St Paul's School survey reports (see B in 3.2.2), many local parents are concerned about bad influences on children. This can be particularly acute for Muslim parents, who may have poor English and limited understanding of white cultures.

In response, the Asian Project developed a club for local children. Sunday was for Bible stories, and other days for play, craft and educational activities. Most of the children attending were Muslims,

but there were also some from other backgrounds. Because of the Biblical concern for families, contact was maintained with the parents of all children involved, and the commandment to "Honour your father and mother" was taught by action as well as words throughout.

Another initiative came from a Christian with artistic gifts in response to the murder of Mr Miah. He designed a mural about the area with the aid of local school children. It now graces a gable end in the Triangle area: it centres on the image of a dove, is surrounded by scenes showing enmity and reconciliation in local contexts, and bears the legend, "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for if we sow seeds of goodness and peace we shall surely reap a harvest" in English, Urdu and Bengali.

C. The preservation of the human race.

God's passionate commitment to wicked humankind (see 3.6.5) is the driving force behind His mission, and therefore behind ours. It is to Muslims as well as Christians, but also to vandals and thieves and racists as well as to their victims. Thus He is the judge not only of the white perpetrators of racist violence, but also of any prejudiced and judgemental responses in their victims. He not only wants the victims to be able to live in peace, but also that the perpetrators should repent and be forgiven.

The implication here is that no one should be outside the concern of the church. An individual missionary cannot reach everyone, but the whole community should be the concern of the whole church. Racism and partiality are not to be countenanced (See also Deut 10v17-19, James 2v1ff). This was one of the motivations behind the setting up of the St Paul's Elswick Asian Project: it was realised that, without a specific initiative, people of non-western cultures would be omitted from the church's mission and ministry.

D. Mission to a world gone wrong

The reader of Genesis 1-11 has no need to be surprised or shocked at the problems in Elswick. God's diagnosis of His world in 6v5 and 8v21

would lead us to expect to see evidences of evil: our mission is then not to bemoan it but to respond to it with Him.

God's first response to the world gone wrong is seen immediately after the first sin, when He is first pictured as coming (Gen 2v8-9). Previously, He has been involved with human beings as Creator, clearly other than them and in a different category than His creatures. Now, as a result of the entrance of evil into His world, He comes and joins it. This can be regarded as the beginning of His mission (see Hedlund 1985 p5-17).

There are several implications of taking this as starting point:

D.1 Mission is to fallen people.

It was because of the predicament resulting from the fall that God came, and therefore to people in this predicament that He sends us. This is not to deny the responsibilities and joys of creation, but to put them in a different category. It is the category of mission that concerns us here. While they may not ignore involvement in life and relationships, the people of God are sent as part of God's dealing with sin and its consequences.

D.2 Mission is to people in hiding

God's first action was to call Adam and Eve to account. Unlike the Qur'anic Adam, the Biblical pair hid because they were afraid. They may have been greedy enough to disobey, but they had the sense to realise that there were severe consequences of challenging God. God's first job was to call them to admit their guilt and face those consequences.

Sadly, both tried to avoid responsibility. God's response was to spell out the immediate consequence of sin for all concerned: the first task of mission is, then, to call people to acknowledge sin and to recognise its consequences.

D.3 Judgement is with a view to redemption.

Although there seems to be little good news in this story, there are hints that God's dealing with fallen people is for their ultimate good.

First, the God who calls them to account and punishes them for sin is also the God who provides for them and cares for them (e.g. the clothing of 3v21). Even the barring of the way back into the garden is then an act of mercy, since it limits the extent of the rebellion and its consequences. Since God is one, His opposition to sin is part of His concern for His creation.

Secondly, although the result of disobedience was said to be death (2v17), Adam and Eve did not die physically at this stage. This is not to deny the spiritual death spoken of by most commentators, nor Paul's discussion of death through Adam in Romans 5v12-17. It is to say that, although God had every right not only to exile them but also to destroy them, He chose not to do so. They were expelled from Eden, but they continued on earth and were blessed with children.

Thirdly, there is a possible hint of Jesus. 3v15 is, in its context, not easy to understand, but Christians have long interpreted it as pointing to Jesus (See Wenham p78-9). Although it is unlikely to have been intentionally messianic, it certainly suggests a conquest of evil through the human race, and fits the Old Testament pattern of announcements of judgement accompanied by hints of future restoration.

D.4 The missionary also needs mission.

There is no suggestion that humanity is divided into missionaries and those who need mission. If Adam and Eve represent all, then all are in the same predicament and God's mission is to all. This means that those who are called to mission must first - and continuously - receive and respond to God's mission themselves. It also means that mission is not from superior to inferior, but from one group of sinners to another.

The Noah story adds a further response to fallen humanity:

D.5 Mission is motivated by grief.

If God's response to the wickedness of Gen 6v1-7 was an involved grief, then so should ours be. The Christian is called to share the tension of judgement and mercy for the fallen world; but we can only

do this faithfully if we also share even in minute proportion in God's passion for His image. This is the passion of the cross.

3.7.2 Blessing for the nations

The call of Abraham signals God's intention of blessing all nations (Gen 12v3), and sets in motion the salvation history that Christians recognise as culminating in Jesus Christ. If Abraham is the first missionary ¹, Genesis 1-11 describes the world into which he is called.

Within it, there are individuals and ethnic groups, but we share a common nature and predicament. All have the same origin, all are in the image of God, and all are under the Noachic covenant. All live in a world gone wrong, and all are liable to sin and the resulting judgement and suffering. It is notable in our context that, although there are possible allusions in 11v1-9, there are no specific references to different religions or to the worship of different gods. The levelling includes all people of all religions as well as of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Missiologists have acknowledged the importance of Genesis 1-11 as the background for mission (see 1.4), but have in practice given it little consideration. Evangelicals in particular have often been so concerned with doctrines of salvation that they have given little attention to those of creation. Packer (1981, p102) suggests that this has weakened us in several areas, including appreciation of the natural sciences; encounter with deism, pantheism and materialism; understanding the cosmic dimensions of mission; theologising about nature and, most importantly in our context,

an atomic individualism, really a product of European rationalism and romanticism two centuries ago, has crept into our thinking about individuals before God, making us unable, it seems, to take seriously enough the family, racial, national and Adamic solidarities which Scripture affirms as part of the created order.

In inter-faith relations, this lack is particularly serious. It means that, while evangelicals are strong on the uniqueness of Christ for salvation and make important contributions to evangelism, some find it difficult to think of people of other faiths other than as needing to be

converted. Issues of race and culture as well as of religions have until recently been the concern of missionaries overseas, and creeds and doctrinal statements have not had to take account of them. Similarly, ideas about creation and human nature have largely been assumed, so that statements of faith scarcely mention them, except to say that we are all fallen. More recent statements (e.g. the 1986 CROSSLINKS statement in Appendix I) do mention creation: perhaps an indication that we are at last recognising that such beliefs can no longer be assumed.

The lack of emphasis on creation and humanity means not only that there has been little thinking in this area, but also that some are frightened of it. The fear is that a focus on areas that are common to all people may detract from the uniqueness of Christ and the need of salvation. Thus, for example, an article (Glaser 1993) mentioning that all people are covenant people under the Noachic covenant provoked accusations that this implied universalism and effective denial of the uniqueness of Christ, despite the fact that the article also spoke of Christ as the only saviour.

There is, then, a feeling of disorientation for some evangelicals looking at our multi-faith society. Their world is no longer what they thought it was: it suddenly contains the sort of people they have never met before, and their theology gives them few clues for reorientation.

Genesis 1-11, as a fundamental description of the world, is of key importance here (see 3 of Appendix II). It shows that this has always been a world of nations; and those nations are both part of God's blessing and gone wrong. They are at enmity with one another and plagued by misunderstandings; but it is these nations that God intends to bless through the mission started in Abraham.

Mitchell (1993) discusses positive views of Abraham's relatives that are not of the chosen line (Lot, Ishmael, Esau) and of other nations in Genesis. Although Judaism, Christianity and Islam all lay claim to Abraham as "theirs", Genesis shows that God called him for everyone.

It has many references to the nations who are to be blessed through Abraham's offspring, although Abraham and his family fail noticeably in their mission to bring blessing to them. The exception is Joseph, who brings blessing to his master, to Pharaoh and to the whole of Egyptian society.

The Genesis interest in nations is a necessary theological framework for understanding our mixed societies. Most western Christians also need a shift of perspective to see themselves as part of a world of peoples incorporated into the Abrahamic blessing through Christ. This shifts mission perspective from that of "privileged" Christians criticising the faiths others to that of including the whole of humanity in God's concerns.

There is then no question of superiority and no need for fear. People who might be perceived as strange and as other become part of our human family, and differences are seen as part of God's blessing in creation even before they are possible sources of strife, misunderstanding and confusion.

Further, mission is released from cultural imperialism. If nations and cultures are seen as part of God's good creation (albeit gone wrong), then national and cultural characteristics will be as much part of restored humanity as they were of fallen humanity. As the church includes males and females with their characteristics, so it should include people from all ethnic backgrounds with their characteristics. This requires not only an appreciation of the present multi-cultural nature of the church but also a recognition that mission does not call people to British - or any other - culture, but to Christ.

However, recognition of the importance of ethnic differences means that mission should be carried out on the basis of as much understanding of those differences as possible. The missionary needs to be aware of his or her own background, and the mission needs to be appropriate to the background of its recipients.

3.7.3 Hope for Elswick?

One of the agendas for the thesis has been the "reading" of community. Over against the various political and social approaches outlined in 2.5.1, the study so far has explored human problems in theological terms, and suggested that they are rooted in relationships that have gone wrong on both divine and human levels. We now consider briefly how our Genesis gleanings might relate to the deprivation/depravity, debate of 2.5.2, and whether they offer any hope for the area.

The study has affirmed that each individual must take responsibility for his or her own actions, and thus implies that those who insisted that the "rioters" were sinners were correct. However, it has also noted a variety of deprivations that have spoilt the area, and therefore eroded necessary limitations to wickedness.

Some Muslim friends say, "Why don't you tell the bad boys not to do those things?" They suggest a deprivation of knowledge. It is true that educational standards are low (see Fig 5 of 3.2.2), that knowledge of the Bible is limited, and that many youngsters are brought up to see some crime as right. However, St Paul's School has consistently taught the ten commandments, and by no means all its pupils follow them. Genesis teaches that knowledge, while necessary, is not enough. If Adam and Eve could disobey the direct teaching of God in the ideal situation of Eden, education can make people more employable (always supposing that there were more employment), but cannot of itself solve our problems.

Some debaters mentioned in 2.5.2 demanded earlier and more effective punishments. That is, they perceived a deprivation of discipline. God's disciplining of His creatures in Genesis suggests that this is at least as serious as the deprivation of knowledge. However, punitive discipline is appropriate only after things have gone wrong. As the continuing sin after the flood shows, it can limit the effects of wickedness, but cannot in itself put them right.

Our study has suggested that, while the deprivations of knowledge and of discipline are serious, they are not the most basic. The root deprivations occur in the areas of God's purposes for His creatures. They are deprivations of work, and of relationships with other human beings and with God. It is such deprivations, and particularly the latter, that are linked with depravity.

A sign of hope is that none of the above deprivations are necessarily economic or political. If they were so, then the people of Elswick would be dependent on powerful outsiders. We would be locked into this aspect of the plight of post-fall women (see 3.5.1); and experience has shown that the powerful people outside Elswick have been either unwilling or unable to improve the situation (see for example Davies 1972).

The deprivation that most depends on outsiders is that of work: more jobs could transform the situation. However, it has been argued in 3.6.2 that paid work is not the only occupation that can fulfil human purpose. The problem is that many people have neither the knowledge nor the security to find satisfaction in other purposeful activity. If they cannot find their identity in employment, they do not know where else to find it.

The Genesis answer is that identity is found first in relationship with God, and then in relationship to human beings - in families, communities and peoples. The St Paul's School Development Project reports that, while many respondents expressed concern about jobs and resources, "everyone spoken to or completing questionnaires also emphasised personal and social attitudes and values as the root cause of the problems" (section 7). It therefore concludes that what is most needed is the promotion of "good child care and secure home situations".

This is, of course, a difficult task when many parents have themselves had poor care and little security, but it does give hope. If relationships are the key, then some of us can work on them whatever the local and national politics. The Development Project has

responded to its survey by recommending the appointment of a worker to

- * develop good, supportive relationships with parents/carers,
- * create opportunities for parents/carers to share the needs they feel as parents/carers and to build up parenting skills,
- * create links between parents/carers for mutual support, encouragement and growth in self-esteem,
- * work alongside staff and children at school to indentify the children's needs,
- * work with parents/carers to meet these needs. (Job specification)

According to our Genesis interpretation, this is just what is needed. However, such work need not await specialist workers. All of us can offer love to our neighbours, and can hope for improvement of the situation, however small our contribution.

Further, the Genesis study has indicated that right relationships with people depend on right relationships with God. If such right relationship is open to anyone through Christ, then the least of us can receive care and security through Him and hence the power to continue loving our neighbours and encouraging them to care for each other.

The hope may appear to be a small one, and the programme works demonstrably slowly; but it is a greater hope than any economic or political policy on offer.

3.7.4 A MESSAGE for Muslims?

If the missiological task is not only living authentic Christianity but also verbal communication of the Gospel message, the question arises as to what that message should be. The comparative exercise has indicated a number of fundamental differences in understanding as well as a measure of commonality, and therefore a message to be communicated as well as a common basis on which communication can be built.

Our Genesis chapters can suggest only a beginning of Gospel communication; but, because they are so basic to Christian understandings of the world, New Testament ideas of incarnation, atonement and salvation simply do not make sense without them. If

doctrines of creation and humanity are assumed rather than explored in Christian-Muslim discussions, it is not surprising if little real communication takes place.

A. Common starting points

The common ground between Christian and Muslim thinking is indeed good news for the Muslims of Elswick. Just as some Christians are brought up to believe that Islam is entirely wrong, most local Muslims have been told that Christians worship three Gods, and a combination of community talk, mosque teaching and exposure to the media leave them assuming that we are sexually immoral, habitually drunk, uncaring about families, racist, disrespectful and generally irreligious. This leads to fear of the white community, and of children being sucked into its perceived moral quicksand.

The news that we believe in one God is a relief: that we also love Him, pray to Him and want to submit ourselves to Him - that we are in that sense *muslim* - is even better. On first contact with Christians, many Muslims need to be reassured of our basic moral stances, and to see us living lives that preach purity, temperance, caring, respect, impartiality and godliness. This lays the foundation for a levelled human relationship which can lead to exploration of common stories and areas of belief. It is only on this basis, I suggest, that we can also explore areas of disagreement without unnecessary confrontation and misunderstanding. It is also on this basis that we can cooperate in areas of common concern.

One of our common dilemmas in Elswick is that of identity, and this is particularly acute for some of the young Muslims. The western environment raises the question, "Who am I?", with its implications of the self, its achievements, its attributes and its place in the universe. The more important question at home may be, "Who are we?" with its implication of loyalty to religion, community and family. The two can produce tensions, especially for young women as the different cultures to which they relate assign different roles to women (see 3.5.1).

Genesis 1-11 deals with both the "I" and the "we", as it describes human beings as both individuals and members of groups. In each case, it also shows both positive and negative potentials. It therefore offers the opportunity of affirming ethnic and family background, but of doing so out of critical awareness rather than with a prejudiced acceptance or rejection. It also affirms the individual and his or her responsibility to decide and act.

B. A Christian message

As will by now be evident, the major divergence between Biblical and Qur'anic thinking in our stories is in the area of diagnosis of the human predicament². If our diagnoses are different, it is not surprising that our answers appear inadequate or irrelevant to each other. This section seeks to summarise some of the important divergences that suggest a basis for a Christian message for Muslims.

B.1 From the Qur'an:

Adam and Eve teach that humanity is not fallen. Both we and the earth are in the state in which God made us. Although even a prophet can make mistakes, it is natural for people to repent when their error is pointed out. God will then forgive them. The move from heaven to earth was already planned by God, and not a consequence of the disobedience. This means that error has no necessary untoward consequences.

Further, human beings have a duty to act as God's stewards on earth. They are superior to other spiritual powers because of what they are taught, but they also have a capacity for choice. The main danger is that they will listen to Satan, and be deceived into using their choice wrongly. They therefore need warning and reminder.

Cain and Abel teach that there are two kinds of people: those who choose God's way (Muslims) and those who go astray (*kāfir*). The latter are the enemies of the former. The Muslims should warn the *kāfirs*, and should be careful that their response to them is right. It is to be expected that the *kāfirs* will treat them badly, but believers will be successful at the judgement. The *kāfirs* who do not listen will

continue in wickedness, and eventually go to hell. In this life, it is the duty of the Islamic state to punish those of them who are guilty of crimes or offences against Islam.

Noah teaches that God sends prophets to call the *kāfirs* to repentance. Some respond, but most reject the prophet and his message. They are enemies of the Muslims, but God rescues the believers and punishes the others. This does not necessarily happen in this life, but is certain at the judgement.

Babel continues the pattern: those who build against God will be destroyed. Enoch continues the pattern of prophecy and the success of believers.

In all, as suggested in 3.6.4, the Qur'anic stories teach that the human tendency is to function wrongly and therefore to lose status: loss of status leads to judgement, but people can be reinstated if they respond to prophetic reminders.

B.2 From Genesis:

Over against this, there is bad news and good news.

The bad news is that no one is "good": noone is a *muslim* (one who submits totally to God) by nature. Adam and Eve disobeyed and did not repent but denied their guilt. Cain stands for us all. The people saved in the flood sinned immediately afterwards, and the world and every person in it continues in ambiguity. The reason that we do not function correctly is that our natures have become distorted because we have broken relationship with God.

The good news is that noone is "bad": all are a mixture, and all are under God's preserving grace. While it is possible to lose status and still be the same person, it is not possible to totally lose nature without being destroyed. Thus all human beings retain something of God's image, following the line of Seth. All receive some blessing - whether Adam and Eve's clothes, Cain's mark, or the continuation of the human race through their offspring.

Further, God has ways of dealing with us in our ambiguity. First, although He limits the extent of His judgements, He also limits the effects of our wickedness. He binds Himself not to destroy us, but He limits our life span and our ability to work together for evil. Second, the sacrifice points forward to His grace not only in preserving us, but in making it possible for us to be forgiven and transformed - for the broken relationship to be mended and the distorted image to be restored.

In summary, the major question is that implied by Muhajir's (1965) critique of the Bible stories (see 2.2.1): who is the person "after God's heart"? Is it the Qur'anic David who never really sins, or the repentant David of Psalm 51; the always-good Abel, or the returned prodigal? Jesus sums this up in His parable of the tax-collector and the pharisee (Luke 18v9-14). Like Goldsmith (1982, p129), I have found that Muslims told a contextualised version of this story are uncertain as to which of the two will be accepted. That it is the repentant sinner may be news for them, but it is usually accepted as good and right.

The message, then, is not only that we are sinners in that we do wrong things: Muslims and Christians agree on that. It is rather that what has gone wrong is our basic relationship with God, so that our call to people is not first to return to right beliefs and actions, but to return "home" to the Father through the way that He has provided in Christ. Right function should follow.

The contention of this study is that it will only be as such differences are explored that Christians and Muslims will be able to understand each other, and it will only be as Muslim people come to see themselves as sinners that they will be able to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, they, like other people, are hiding from God. We have a prime responsibility of calling them to stop shifting the blame - to acknowledge that evil starts not only outside humanity, but within it. More than that, the evil with which they need to be concerned lies not outside the Islamic community but within it - and not within other Muslims, but within themselves. And the evil that

they see in themselves cannot be ascribed to Satan and his God-given permission to tempt, but to their own rebellion against what they know to be right. We then have the responsibility of living and preaching the love and grace of God for all people. The question is, how shall we do this?

3.7.5 A call to the churches

Following this study, perhaps one of the best ways of communicating the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam is the reading together of the stories. They can prove a relatively non-confrontational place for exploration of basic issues. Jesus used stories, many of which related to and challenged the interpretation of the scriptures known by His hearers. In Elswick too, both in the childrens' club and with individuals, I have found these Genesis stories helpful starting points for discussion and for inviting people to consider the whole Christian "story". Sometimes the Biblical version can also challenge Qur'anic interpretation³.

However, the sharing of these Genesis messages, both the common ground and the distinctively Christian, involves living as well as preaching. If we are right in seeing relationship as the central human characteristic, then mission that pleases God will be characterised first by right relationship with Him and then by right relationships both within the church and with the people to whom we are sent. This is especially important where there are culture and language barriers; and it is the job of the whole church, for our Muslim neighbours will see all of us whether we want them to or not.

If we say we believe that all human beings are made in the image of God and that He is committed to all, then we need to demonstrate this in our relationships with people and our struggles for their welfare. We also need to be committed to the community, to love without partiality, and to act for the good of every member of it⁴. This will involve crossing racial barriers and annoying some of the white people; but it will also involve caring for the marginalised in the Asian community and the criminals and harassers in the white community and shocking some of the Asians.

Perhaps the more difficult challenge is to live and speak the "bad news": the message that all of us are *kāfirs* to some extent. As Jesus' parable mentioned above warns, the great temptation for religious people is self-righteousness, and it is easy to sit with Muslim friends and discuss the short-comings of everyone except present company. We need to be aware of and admitting to our own sins as well as challenging our Muslim friends to recognise theirs. That is, we can only go to others if we have stopped hiding ourselves.

If Genesis 3 teaches nothing else, it warns against seeking to arouse others to acknowledgement of sin without an ongoing acknowledgement of our own. This will involve listening carefully to the accusations that Muslim people may level at us. In the present context, we can do this by listening to the Qur'an as it addresses itself to the children of Adam and the people of the Book.

Our stories have included specific warnings and exhortations. From the Adam stories comes the warning to listen to God and not to Satan, as well as the idea that God will give us the words we need to approach Him. From the Noah stories comes the call to accept God's prophets and the warning that unbelievers will be punished. From the Cain and Abel story comes the warning against jealousy and murder, and particularly against opposing God's prophets and people.

Much of this we can accept; but the call is not only to accept the Biblical prophets but also to accept Muhammad and the Qur'an. The repeated implication is that, as Christians, we are the ones who are opposing God and His Prophet, we are the ones who are listening to the wrong people, and therefore that we are the ones bound for Hell. If we continue to affirm the central Christian beliefs of incarnation and atonement, we shall continue to be the ones that the Qur'an sees as being under judgement.

In that the Qur'an itself tells Christians that it confirms what we already have, and exhorts us to judge according to the Injīl (Surah 5, Ma'idah:49-50), we are right even in Islamic terms to use the Bible as our yardstick for interpreting the Qur'an. If after study and prayer

we conclude that we have the right documents, and that they are not compatible with accepting Muhammad as the prophet who supercedes Jesus and the Qur'an as sent down (*tanzīl*) from God, we are bound even according to the Qur'an itself to reject it. However, we then paradoxically put ourselves in the place of those it condemns. If we remain Christian and preach our faith, we are liable to find ourselves in one of the categories of Usmani's interpretation of mischief-makers (on Surah 5, Mā'idah:36, see C in 2.4.2), with serious consequences if we live in an Islamic state.

The result of this has been hostility between Christians and Muslims through the centuries⁵, and some of this is inevitable given our history and fundamental differences. The Cain and Abel picture of sibling rivalry is representative of Christian-Muslim relations as well as Jewish-Muslim relations. From the Christian point of view, its basis is usually not so much jealousy as fear. Reflections from my students at Northumbria Bible College suggest that this is the starting point for most of them in approaching Islam. They have been affected by media representations of militant Islam, by Christian representations of Islam as the enemy of Christ, and by news of persecution of Christians in Islamic states. The fear is often linked with anger, especially over the latter.

The challenge to them is not only to dispel the fear by knowledge and understanding, but to react Christianly to what is true: to the fact of repression of Christians and especially converts from Islam, and to the fact of Muslim denials of the Gospel and attacks on Scripture and Christian integrity. We do well to listen to Abel's words to Cain in the Qur'an:

If thou dost stretch out thy hand against me, to slay me, it is not for me to stretch out my hand against thee to slay thee: for I fear God, the Cherisher of the Worlds. 5:31

Abel is determined to do right, whatever his brother does.

If we hear this as addressed to us as possible opponents of Islam, it can alert us in two areas. First, it should check our hostility, as it was intended to check Cain's. It should cause us to deal with our fear and anger before God, and prevent us from attacking Muslim

people even though we may disagree with them. Second, it should make us reflect on our response to any Muslim hostility to us or to other Christians. If Christian minorities are persecuted or considered "second class citizens" in some Muslim states, we should not respond by persecuting or reducing the citizenship rights of Muslim minorities in the U.K.

In fact, as Christians we should go much further than the Qur'anic Abel, whose main concern seems to have been to retain his own purity. We have come to one whose blood speaks louder than the blood of Abel (Heb 12v24), and our opposite to Cain's hatred is to be love (1 Jn 3v11-15). This love is defined by the death of Jesus (ibid v16), and we are to follow Him, even in the face of injustice:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2v21-24

Whatever else we are called to in Elswick, we are called to share God's grief for it. There is, of course, hope beyond grief as there is resurrection beyond the cross, but without Christlike, self-giving love, all our attempts at incarnational involvement and appropriate evangelism are but taking the name of our Lord in vain.

Notes on 3.7

1. So Smith 1884, and Gal 3v8 has him as the first recipient of the Gospel proclamation.
2. See also Adams 1984 and the discussions in Ahmad and Kerr 1976.
3. See for example Woodberry's (1989b) use of the Qur'anic Adam story to indicate a stronger Islamic teaching on sin that most Muslims would allow.
4. The Chambesy conference on mission and *da'wah* indicates Islamic uneasiness about Christian *diakonia*, seeing it as exploitative and manipulative (Ahmad and Kerr 1976, pp 456-9). This warning notwithstanding, the Biblical imperative is such that the responsibility of service as part of mission cannot be avoided.
5. For a history of western responses to Islam, see Daniel 1993. For an example of anti-Christian polemic, see Jameelah 1978.

Chapter 4: Model and assessment

1.1 stated the intention that the particular study should function as an experiment from which a general model could be abstracted and offered for use elsewhere. This chapter abstracts the model and seeks to assess it.

4.1 The model

The basis of the experiment has been the perception that all acts of knowing depend on the passions and commitments of the knower. Explication and exploitation of this dependency has been its major characteristic.

This affects not only the content of knowing, but also the process of obtaining knowledge. For knowledge gained by reading texts, this means that both ways of reading and choices of interpretation are determined by the individual reader and her context. In comparative theology, where at least two texts are to be read, passions and commitments will determine approaches to both texts and thus square possible ways of reading.

My passion has been for faithful discipleship in the place in which I believe God has called me to be His missionary. The model developed is, then, of a particular choice in comparative theology: that of comparison carried out with a missionary motive and in order to achieve a contextualised reading.

4.1.1 General methodology

The model is characterised by a "studiously and stubbornly particular stance" (Clooney 1993 p4) which has enabled a journey by a particular person into a particular context. It has been developed by the application of action research concepts borrowed from sociology and education, and offered in testable form using techniques of scientific reporting that specify apparatus, explore personal factors and separate results from methods and inferences.

The the action research model has had several results. First, there has been a refusal to decide beforehand how reading should be carried out and what it might produce: methods and questions have been viewed as results rather than input. Second, there has been a series of what might be described as interlocking spirals, as feedback circuits have been set up between reader and Books, Qur'an and Bible, reader and community and communities and Scriptures. Such circuits have been described as conversation. Third, the conversations have been used to recognise similarities and differences and thence to set up analogical systems whereby disparate entities can be understood in relationship to each other.

4.1.2 Specific programme

The methods arising from such an approach arise from the interactions: they are determined not only by the personal but also by the objects of study. The reading method developed is, then, a response to the particular experimental situation. However, from it can be abstracted a framework that can be offered to other readers in other contexts. The analysis is logical rather than temporal. That is, the steps of the programme can develop simultaneously rather than moving linearly from (a) to (f).

(a) The reader's passions and commitments are recognised. This is not in order to remove them and obtain an "objective" result, but to recognise and exploit the inevitably personal nature of the reading. It frees the reader to utilise his or her own characteristics, to recognise their limitations and to prepare for conversation with other readers.

(b) Reasons for reading the "other's" text are identified, since reasons for reading determine ways of reading. They will depend on (a). In this model, the passions are missiological. The reasons for reading the "other" text are that it determines the thinking of those to whom the missionary is sent, and that the first step in communication must be listening. This means that the "other" - in this case the Qur'an - is read as the sacred book of its adherents,

and therefore in its wider context of commentary relevant to the particular community.

(c) Comparable material is sought, which allows comparison of content and /or form. In this particular study, the parallels were sought in the two Scriptures, but it would be possible to choose other religious classics.

(d) Comparable reading methods are identified, so that the texts can be read in a way that is valid in both systems. This has been problematic in reading the Qur'an and the Bible together, since the Books are handled so differently by their interpreters. While it has been possible to find ways of reading the texts together, it has been necessary to supplement this by separate considerations within the two commentarial systems.

(e) Conversation is set up between the two texts. They are read separately and then together, and questions are taken from one to the other in order to identify the similarities-in-difference or differences-in-similarity that constitute the analogical systems of 2.4.3.

(f) The basic comparison having been set up, theological reflection follows. Continuing the journey into the particular, this is done with reference to the particular community that provoked the study. Aspects of the texts are recognised in the community, and aspects of the community in the texts. On the basis of this reflection and recognition, conversations are set up with individuals and groups to test the reader's perceptions and enable application of and obedience to theological imperatives.

4.2 Towards an assessment

The curriculum . . . is to be judged by whether it advances our knowledge rather than by whether it is right . . . What we ask of a curriculum offering is not that it be right or good but that it should be intelligent and penetrating. Its dilemmas should be important dilemmas. Its shortcomings should reflect real and important difficulties.

Stenhouse 1975, p125

Thus Stenhouse on the research model of curriculum development, discussed in 1.3.3. Curriculum here is "a policy recommendation

expressed in a framework of action", and the curriculum developer one who explores problems rather than offers solutions (p124).

The present model is offered as such a policy recommendation. The question of assessment is therefore not whether it is true or false, right or wrong, but whether it is productive and more widely applicable. It does, however, raise questions of truth: I would add to Stenhouse's criteria those of coherence, and whether it leads towards truth.

4.2.1 Is it productive?

A. Hermeneutic achievements

Perhaps the major achievement in the evangelical context is the recognition that translation models of Biblical understanding are insufficient, and the offering of an alternative. Cross-cultural and inter-faith mission raises questions which cannot be satisfactorily addressed on the basis of a hermeneutic developed within a single Christian culture. They need to be explored in particular cross-cultural and inter-faith contexts, and on the basis of comparative studies.

The focus on the particular and the interactive method have also produced results similar to what Sugirtharajah (1991a) calls "major achievements of the hermeneutics of the marginalised" (p434ff) in the 'Postscript' to his volume on Third World Biblical interpretation. These include

Solidarity and performative interpretation as ways of overcoming the hermeneutical gap.

The underprivileged as the hermeneutical focus.

Fruitful fusion of struggles and scholarship.

The importance of social location and exposure of 'value-free' reading.

Setting goals - transforming the world.

Although the study has not shared the liberation starting points of most of the writers in Sugirtharajah's collection, its results have reflected many of their concerns. The hermeneutic can be seen as appropriate to situations of oppression or deprivation. It also

suggests that liberation concerns can arise from insisting on Scripture rather than context as prior authority, and in the western as well as the non-western world.

B. Narrative readings

No particular model of narrative reading was put into the study, but the methodology has resulted in the stories being heard in a variety of ways. Thiselton (1992 p566ff) offers four models for "drawing readers into narrative worlds", each of which can be discerned in the study:

Narrative as parable, catching the reader off-guard and reversing expectations. The ends of the Genesis stories have all been discerned as surprises: Adam and Eve do not repent but neither do they die, Cain has his sentence ameliorated, and the Babel generation is not destroyed. Those familiar with only the Genesis versions are no more likely to notice these reversals than are those over-familiar with Jesus' parables. The comparative process assists here. The Qur'anic endings are perceived as reversals of the Genesis endings; and it can then be seen that those in the Qur'an are in many ways more "fair" than those in the Bible, so that the Genesis surprises are highlighted.

Narrative as describing personhood and used for reaching understanding of identities of person and of God. That personality emerges in narrative rather than description has been of central importance, and the major thrust of the exposition in 3.6 has concerned human identity. The stories of human-divine interactions both confront us with who we are and witness to the personhood of God.

Narrative as stimulating imagination and exploration of possible worlds. Both Qur'anic and Biblical stories invite us in imagination into the worlds they describe. We can visualise Adam and Eve's temptation, feel for them as one son murders another, compare Noah's world to our own, and imagine the terror of the drowning people. The most inviting aspect of both texts is, perhaps, their gaps¹. It is into these

that commentators have interpolated speculations, and it is they that provoke questions that need to be answered from outside the texts. In the comparative study, the gap-filling has been important because the Qur'an can be seen as filling Genesis' gaps in a way that claims absolute authority.

Narrative as speech-act, with consequent illocutionary force. Self-involvement has been a central objective. It has been intended that the Bible should be heard with all its illocutionary force, and not only as information. The Qur'anic stories are more obviously speech-act than those in Genesis, since they are consciously didactic, and some act as legal bases. The Genesis stories do, however, have illocutionary force: they do not simply inform about the world, but do so from a particular stance and in affirmation of their truth. Thus they "generate assertions, questions, expressions and promises" (Thiselton 1992 p570) which demand response. It has been a concern of this thesis to hear and respond to such demands.

In summary, the stories may

subvert, entice, create conditions for the possibility of identity and identification, stimulate imagination and project future possibilities, or project worlds which potentially set in motion illocutions. They may also convey self-involving descriptions from a point of view, nourish social solidarity by corporate remembrance and celebration, may affirm, challenge, or create pre-conditions for the next step in the process of understanding.

Thiselton 1992 p570

As the Biblical and Qur'anic worlds have been allowed to challenge each other as well as their reader, the Genesis stories have acted for transformation in all these ways.

C. Insights gained

C.1 The Genesis text

The reading has both shed new light onto old understandings and raised issues not remarked on by commentators. In overview, for example, it has resulted in a focus on the grief of God and the flood as keys to understanding God's reactions to His world, and on the world-after-the-flood as an ambiguous world of nations. In particulars, there are the explorations of Eve as mother in Gen 4, and

of the questions of why Eve is apparently not expelled from Eden and why Noah's family should be the ones saved with him.

Most of these insights could have arisen otherwise; but the fact is that they did arise through the comparative study. There is no intrinsic reason why, for example, the balancing effect of Eve's motherhood in Genesis 4 should not have come out of one of the many studies of Eve from Christian feminist perspectives; but, until very recently, it did not². It arose because the Qur'an omits the birth and naming of Cain and Abel, and therefore provokes the question, "Why does Genesis include it?"

C.2 Christian-Muslim relations

There have been insights into Christian and Muslim thinking and therefore into relationships and mission. These have focussed on the dignity of human beings, and on differences of diagnosis of the human condition.

Many of the insights echo those recorded elsewhere³. This is encouraging, in that it suggests their validity. However, it is also important that they have grown out of the comparative study, and that this study has sought to treat the Qur'an in the context of its Muslim readers. Through this, the study has added weight to the observations of others, explored the basis for their comparative understandings and extended them.

For example, Adams' (1984) and Woodberry's (1989b) discussions of diagnoses of the human condition are affirmed in their understanding that these are fundamental to differences between Islam and Christianity. However, it is also shown that the diagnoses are corollaries of even more fundamental differences in perceptions of human nature. Woodberry's dilemma about the apparent contradiction between Qur'anic views of human obduracy and Islamic views of humanity as unfallen is then resolved (see 3.6.4).

That all this has been done in context has meant that the general diagnoses of Genesis 1-11 have been used to illuminate the particular

predicaments of Elswick. It has shown that the predicaments are shared by all people, and has therefore contributed to both solidarity and hope.

D. Questions raised

It has been said that the raising of questions is one of the most important results of research (see 1.4). This study has raised a plethora of questions, some of which it has explored, some of which have been addressed only as necessary for current purposes, and some of which have merely been raised.

D.1 Questions have arisen about the relationship between the texts.

First, there is the question of how the texts are understood by their readers. The suggestion has been made that, while the Qur'an is understood as speech-act, the Bible is understood as speech arising out of God's actions in relationship with human beings. This distinction has been raised as an observation to be questioned and tested. In particular, the implications about the nature of Biblical revelation as what might be termed "act-speech" need to be explored.

Second, parallels between methods of interpreting the Bible and methods of developing Islamic law have been identified, and this has raised questions of how understandings of authority affect expectations as well as interpretations of Scriptures. Alongside this is the question of whether the western categories of "critical" and "pre-critical" are appropriate to Islamic uses of texts.

Third, the question of theological rather than historical or literary relationship between Biblical and Qur'anic stories has been raised. This has been accompanied by questions about Midrashic method, which again has led to questions about authority, this time that of the Qur'an as compared to that of Midrash. There is room for addressing these questions to other Biblical stories referred to in the Qur'an.

D.2 Some insights have resulted from questions.

The questions have been raised by the comparison in different ways. Those about the silences of the Biblical Noah and Abel were provoked

by the Qur'an's addition of their speech, and questions about why it was the family that was saved with Noah by the Qur'anic contradiction, especially as exploited by the commentators. Some of the discussion of gender resulted from the observation that the Qur'an does not differentiate between the roles of Adam and Eve in the fall, which provoked the question of why Genesis does so.

The *khalīfah*/image distinction grew out of asking whether the use of small differences in similar announcements of the creation of human beings implied different ideas of human nature. A tentative answer was then explored in the rest of the comparative study, and became an important hermeneutic key. The question has not, however, been thoroughly explored in this thesis. The validity of the distinction needs to be tested in the light of further comparative studies, and this can be used to provoke further questions about function/status and relationship/nature and their relative priorities in reading the Scriptures.

D.3 Questions of Christian discipleship have been raised.

The study has acted as a challenge to the ministry of the researcher, and has also offered a variety of challenging questions for other Christians in response to both urban priority environments and mission amongst Muslims.

Some of these are theological: What can be considered as deprivation? Who is responsible for it? How does God respond to it? How does He expect us to respond? How do we understand cultures, nations, religions and their effects on people?

Some are practical: What are the points of hope on which we can work? Where should we work together with Muslim as well as other members of the community? How shall we care for our environment, bring up our children and discipline our criminals? How can we overcome cultural and linguistic misunderstandings? How can we effectively communicate the Christian Gospel?

Perhaps the most challenging are personal: Where do we hold wrong prejudices? Where are we hiding from God? Where are we carrying out mission without listening to and understanding the people to whom we believe we are sent?

In all this, the great question is whether we are seeking to be involved in God's mission as His people, or whether we have become too focussed on our function and status to share His passionate, committed relationship with the people He has made.

4.2.2 Applicability

The model having developed through a particular experiment, it must be asked whether it can be used in other particular contexts. This cannot be tested by the present writer, but only through other experiments elsewhere. One writer who has reported such an experiment is Francis X. Clooney (see also 1.1). His Theology After Vedanta (1993) offers a model of reading a Christian classic in the context of a classic of another faith. Despite dealing with different texts and arising from different interests and motivations, it indicates a convergence with the present model that gives hope of wide applicability.

A North American Jesuit, Clooney does Christian theology in the context of Hinduism rather than Islam. The Christian text chosen is not the Bible, but the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas. While he recognises that there are different reasons for choosing to be involved in comparative study⁴, he gives little account of his own passions. However, the history of his involvement suggests that his prime interest is language and text, and that his main motivation is an intellectual fascination with the widening contexts provided by other religious texts.

My missiological starting point and methodological acknowledgement of motivations and commitments contrast with Clooney's approach. However, he recognises (p 202) that the missionary context is one possible motivation for comparative study. This means that, although he restricts his reading context to that of the texts, he does not

exclude the wider context of community. Although the motivation does affect the reading, the actual comparison of texts can be done as the basis of a variety of theological projects. This means that there can be convergence in reading methods despite divergence over emergent theology.

A. Convergence on what is to be read

Clooney insists on reading commentaries as part of his text. In fact, he refers to the basic text and its network of commentaries as Text, and sees the commentaries as necessary to proficient reading. He also reads Aquinas with his commentaries and his textual referent, the Bible. That is, he reads the Hindu text in its Hindu context and the Christian text in its Christian context.

Similarly, the choice of reading the Qur'an as part of the context has led to the attempt to read it through commentaries which have been viewed as primary material. The Bible has also been read alongside commentaries, but there is a divergence here. My evangelical tradition allows much less authority to the church's traditions (as expressed, for example, in commentaries) than does Clooney's Roman Catholic tradition. Thus, while my use of Islamic texts surrounding the Qur'an closely parallels his of the whole network of Vedanta, my focus on my own understanding of the Biblical texts in the context of mission in Elswick differs from his on understanding Aquinas in textual context. I have used the Biblical commentators as aids to understanding the text and not as part of the Text to be studied.

B. Convergence on doing theology after reading the other Text.

This is expressed in the very title of Clooney's book, Theology After Vedanta (my italics). He notes that one is inevitably changed by reading the texts of another faith, and that subsequent reading of one's own tradition will therefore also be changed (p7). During the reading of the other, questions of truth should be deferred in order to understand (p187ff). They can be raised again as the theologising proceeds, but it is important that this occurs after the reading of the other.

Clooney does not envisage that the theology after reading will lead to rejecting Christian faith or to including Hindu ideas into it. Rather, he expects a retrieval of the Christian text as aspects of it that are neglected by orthodoxy are highlighted in the comparative process:

Those who would expect from comparative theology sensational new teachings should inevitably be disappointed. p189

Similarly, I approached this study having already decided to be Christian rather than Muslim (although I would have been willing to re-assess this decision had the study demanded it), but with the expectation that the comparison would result in a renewed appreciation of Genesis as well as of the Qur'an. However, this renewed appreciation could only be attained after the Qur'an reading, and it was important that the Qur'an be read as far as possible in its own terms before attempting comparison.

C. Convergence on juxtaposition of texts.

Clooney (chapter 5) describes several models for comparing texts. These include coordination, using of texts together, perhaps beyond the uses warranted by the texts and their contexts; superimposition of one text on the other, to temporarily enhance one text by the other; comparative conversation, as in Tracy's model described below; comparative tension, where the texts taken together are seen as communicating more than either alone; and collage, where texts are allowed to destabilize each other.

He chooses to juxtapose his two texts, physically on the page as well as by mental construct. This effectively sets up the comparative conversation which enables perception of similarities and differences⁵ (p164-7), and is closely parallel to my method of reading together. He then allows the emphases of the Hindu text to direct his reading of the Christian text.

D. Convergence on unpredictability of outcome.

Clooney insists that the outcome of comparative reading cannot be determined beforehand, but only by the process of reading (p154-5). Even the reading process is determined by itself, particularly in his specific case because the Texts themselves direct the reading.

Similarly, I have chosen to let my questions and methods arise from the study and not attempted to determine them beforehand. The reading of the Qur'an has been determined by seeking to understand it in its wider context of Muslim readers. This has then determined something of the approach to the Bible, and therefore to the whole enterprise.

E. These convergences point to a convergence on the need for skilled reading. This is not only an outcome of the choice to compare texts, but also of attention to the respective demands of both Hindu and Muslim Texts for their readers to have the correct skills. As noted in C.1 of 2.3.2, the Islamic condition for skilled reading is not only that the reader be suitably educated but also that (s)he be a Muslim. There are similar demands of faith as well as skill from the Vedanta. Hence, as Clooney notes (p4), the Christian reader is inevitably an outsider, even though (s)he chooses to be a reader. Skill in reading is therefore limited, but it is the reader's obligation to become as skilled as possible.

F. All this reflects the idea of comparative theology as an extension of context (Clooney p7). If the Christian faith is universal, then it must be able to include all other systems in its understanding, despite their conflicting traditions and demands. Thus the other is to be understood as part of the world in which the Christian texts are written and read, and must be so understood if the Christian faith tradition "can claim the world entirely and universally" (p6).

This requires "a particular, peculiar kind of theological confidence" (p6), which enables the theologian to study the other thoroughly and fearlessly, in the expectation that the truth of his or her belief can only be vindicated and understanding enhanced by the process, while any exposure of error in it will be welcomed. It is with this confidence that I, too, have approached my study, and that is, I would agree, necessary to any effective comparative theology.

In all, there is a remarkable degree of convergence despite the different contexts and theological presuppositions. It is interesting that Clooney leaves the exploration of the latter to the end of his study, saying that, whatever our theologies of religion and ideas of truth

We can in fact read and compare, we do understand in part, misunderstand in part; we are in fact changed in the process, and we do in fact reread our traditions differently while yet remaining members of our original communities. p193

If the comparison rather than the particulars is the focus, it is not then surprising that similarities of process develop.

4.2.3 Coherence

This can be explored in two directions. First, is the model consistent with the world-view perceived in Genesis? Second, are the results of the comparison consistent with the views of Christianity and Islam on which it was based?

A. Genesis and the model

A.1 The nature of persons.

The exploitation of the particular and the conversation-recognition-analogy model relate to a rejection of the Enlightenment idea of the autonomous rational subject through the recognition that all knowledge is personal (see A.2.1 of 4.2.4). This can be seen as consistent with the Genesis view of persons developed in 3.6. Although I have argued that Genesis sees people as individuals with a God-given autonomy, I have also shown that identity is in relationship with both God and other persons. There is also relationship with animals and ground, so that human beings can never be detached subjects over against objects even in the physical realm.

Further, the methods used have assumed the importance of the commitments of the researcher, as determined by her cultural background and membership of groups. This is consistent with the reading of Genesis which sees genealogies and the table of nations as the major means of identifying people. In both these areas, the initial intentions described in 1.3 have been intensified in response to their perceived affirmation in Genesis.

A.2 The ability to name.

Over against the Qur'an, we have noted the autonomy and responsibility of the Biblical Adam in naming the animals. Rather than being taught the names, he is invited into the creative activity of naming. This is reflected in a measure of confidence in the personal reading of Genesis: as a human person, the reader has both right and responsibility to make her own study rather than accepting prior interpretations as authoritative.

A.3 Languages and nations.

The reading of Genesis has led to a focus on the world of nations, which coheres with the mixed milieu and the cross-cultural mission in which it has been based. However, while the Genesis concern affirms the interests of the study, the actual reading has been carried out by only one reader from one particular background. As suggested below, this is a major limitation of the study. To be thoroughly consistent with the Genesis warnings about cross-cultural misunderstanding, it should have been carried out by a multi-cultural and multi-lingual team.

A.4 Suspicion.

One of the major insights of Genesis is into the fallen state of humanity: all human beings are liable to rebellion, and therefore to denial of their own sins and errors, to jealousy of others and to a desire to build their own reputations.

This means that all interpretations of the Scriptures are open to suspicion, and all interpreters to the temptation of using them for their own ends. Thus, while there has been an attempt to listen to the various commentators, it has been subject to the awareness that any or all might be wrong. Most importantly, there has been a constant awareness of this reader's own limitations and personal interests: all readers of the study are invited to read her interpretation with suspicion.

B. Bible and Qur'an

Several important differences between the ways the Books are

perceived and interpreted were noted in chapter 2, and were influential in developing ways of comparative reading. The comparison has produced several results consistent with its initial assumptions.

In particular, it was noted that Muslims see God's primary revelation as the prophetic word, so that the Qur'an can be understood as divine speech-act. In contrast, it was suggested that the Bible sees God's primary revelation in terms of His relationship with human beings, and the Bible can be understood as speech arising from and effecting that relationship.

Several aspects of the comparative study affirm this. First, the khalīfah/image distinction implies different contexts and purposes for revelation. If the context is that of caliphate, the purpose is to call to correct function and consequent reinstatement: words are needed, and they must be active to be effective. If the context is that of image, the purpose is to recall to relationship and restore what has been corrupted. Words are also needed in this case, but it is appropriate that they arise from actions in relationship; and more than words are necessary if the corruption is one of nature and not only of function.

Second, the comparative study indicates that Genesis and the Qur'an present God as dealing with humanity in different ways. This is clearest in the Noah stories, where the Qur'anic Noah is a prophet while the Biblical Noah is silent: this indicates the priority of the verbal message in the Qur'an. Further, while the Qur'an records conversations between God and prophets, the stories studied do not record Him speaking with other people. In contrast, Genesis includes dialogue between God and the sinful Adam and Eve, and between God and the tempted and then guilty Cain. This suggests the priority of interactive relationship in Genesis. Mutuality is most clearly seen in the grief of God in Genesis 6v6.

Third, it was noted that differing ideas of revelation implied different agendas for interpretation. In particular, the Islamic focus is on sharī'ah and the Christian on relationship. This again reflects the

idea that the *khalīfah* should be concerned with correct function whereas the image should be concerned with correct relationship. It has been found that Qur'anic commentators are also interested in relationship with God and that Biblical commentators are also interested in right action, but the balance of comment suggests that these are not their prime concerns.

4.2.4 Does it lead towards truth?

While appetites are guided by standards of private satisfaction, a passion for mental excellence believes itself to be fulfilling universal obligations. Polanyi 1958 p174

That the focus on the personal and the particular does not require a retreat into subjectivity has been argued in 1.3. Rather, the recognition of personal factors and the following of passions and commitments is necessary if knowledge of objective truth is to be attained. Further, if the purpose of knowledge is obedience, it is necessary that its personal and particular implications be explored.

The methodology adopted has, then, ensured that the researcher and her readers can assess the effects of her personal commitments and particular experiences on the study. It has meant that the demands of discipleship have not been obscured by those of hermeneutics, and that the theory has not been allowed to develop apart from application. It therefore answers the challenges of p6 of this thesis.

However, in that it is personal it depends on a single individual, and in that it is particular it depends on a unique situation. In that the individual is limited and sinful, and the situation may be a special case, its pretensions to universality must be tested.

Approaches to truth have been pretended to in interpreting texts and understanding communities. If the interpretations of Genesis are good, their truth depends on the truth of Genesis: this has been assumed as part of the researcher's commitment (see 2.1.2), and will not be discussed here. We can, however, ask whether the interpretations, understandings and implications for mission offered

can bring Christians and Muslims to a better understanding of each other, and call Christians into truer discipleship. We can further ask whether the hermeneutic is likely to lead towards truth, or whether, if it has done so in this case, this is only because of the accidentals of the particular reader and context.

A. Testing the hermeneutic

The hermeneutic can, as has been suggested, only be tested with reference to other hermeneuts. The literature has therefore been searched for parallels to the conversation-recognition-analogy model which will enable conversation with others to begin. One writer, whose works exhibit several parallels with the present study, has been chosen: David Tracy, a North American Roman Catholic. That parallels exist suggests that the hermeneutic is not idiosyncratic. That Tracy's thought has developed on a different basis from my own suggests the possibility of universality; and the difference in bases gives a comparative context in which to explore ideas of truth.

A.1 Parallel analyses

In his (1987) Plurality and Ambiguity, Tracy uses the words conversation, recognition and analogy to describe the reading of the "classics"⁶. The analysis is built on understandings of the world, the classics and theology as the reading of classics developed in his earlier The Analogical Imagination (1981). This offers several parallels with the present study.

First, Tracy's reflections on the ambiguity of the world (1987, chapter 4) parallel the exposition of the ambiguities of the post-flood world in 3.6.1 and 3.6.4. This implies admitting the possibility that we are wrong and the need for testing individual perceptions through conversations with others (1987 p23). In the cross-cultural context, it also implies admitting where we or our communities have wronged others and the consequent need to converse with them and deal with the wrongs (1987 p72). I would add the need to recognise where we have been wronged and forgive: otherwise, these implications of ambiguity are agreed.

Second, there is his analysis of the various audiences for whom theology may act as public discourse (1981 chapter 1), which relates to his idea of the interpreter as social and historical as well as existential subject and the consequent plurality of possible readings (1981 chapter 4.iii). This parallels my awareness of reading in a variety of communities which become the receptors of my thinking, and is underlined by the Genesis emphasis on personal location.

Third, there is his discussion of the production of classics through two intensifications: that into particularity, and that into differentiation (chapter 4.iv). The artist first journeys into his or her own particularity "in all its finitude and all its striving after the infinite in this particular history with all its effects, personal and cultural" (p125). (S)he then distances her or himself from the particular in order to express the resulting understanding publically.

While I would not begin to claim my work as a classic(!), this two-fold journey can be distinguished twice in this thesis: if it is the way in which classics are produced, there is hope that it is also a fruitful way of producing a thesis. First, there is the focus on the particular in 2.1.1-3, followed by the attempt at a distanced account of a resulting hermeneutic in 2.1.4. Then there is the recording of the particular journey into understanding the stories in Elswick in 3.5 followed by the more distanced exposition and exploration of implications on 3.6-7. This again reflects the focus on personal location at the same time as the concern to enter public discourse.

It is out of such considerations that the model of truth as perceived through conversation arises. Tracy describes the model in chapter 1 of Plurality and Ambiguity. The reader is first "forced to recognise the otherness (of the classic) by confronting an unexpected claim to truth" (p15). (S)he then enters into conversation with it, Tracy's analogy here being that of a game with rules⁷. The key to understanding is asking questions of the text and listening to its questions. This results in the recognition of what originally appeared

different as possible, and hence to an analogical understanding of the text (p20).

A.2 Different starting points

Tracy comes to his conversation-recognition-analogy scheme through seeking a systematic theology in a post-modern world. This he defines as re-interpretation of religious classics⁸. The reading method is in conscious response to the breakdown of enlightenment ideas of autonomous rational readers in the light of the challenges of such classic writers as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud.

What, one might ask, is the link between a deliberate response to post-modernism and a study based in a rather conservative evangelical missionary concern? The answer is three-fold: the influence of Polanyi, views of how things are known and the recognition of plurality.

A.2.1 Polanyi is quoted by Tracy as a post-modernist, despite the fact that he does not use the term and was writing before it was coined:

Witness the scientism and positivism of earlier and of much contemporary philosophy of science grounding the curiously untroubled self-satisfaction, even willed innocence, of many scientists in contrast to the recognition of self-transcendence constitutive of scientific enquiry itself grounding the chastened and liberating formulations of a nature-participatory, a nonspectorial, a value-concerned, "post-modern" science in the works of Toulmin, Ferré, Lonergan, Polanyi. 1981, p342-3.

The key here is that Polanyi is post-positivist, and therefore rejects the "curiously untroubled self-satisfaction" of a science that assumes itself to be objective. He therefore proposes a model that is "nature-participatory", "nonspectorial" and "value-concerned". I have followed this in insisting that I am part of the system I observe, that I cannot stand over against it as a detached observer, and that a value-free study is as undesirable as it is impossible.

Tracy sees post-modern thinking as characteristic of the context in which the classics are to be read, and therefore of the system in which conversation takes place. The key shared idea is the idea that there is no privileged, objective viewpoint⁹. That is, no individual or

even group can claim autonomous objective knowledge. This is the whole contention of Polanyi, the ground for the recognition of plurality and the key to allowing persons to recognise manifestation.

However, I would want to qualify this statement. First, while no human being can claim objectivity in this sense, God can. If there is any being who transcends the human and physical order, and is therefore in a position of total observer, then that being can be considered as having objective judgements and perceptions. As pointed out in 1.3.1 and explored in 3.6.5, God is passionately and committedly involved in the world, but is simultaneously transcendent observer. Further, He does not participate in the ambiguities of humanity, so that His perceptions are not clouded by wickedness or selfishness. He is, therefore, the exception who makes knowledge of the real possible for His image.

Second, the Holy Spirit makes possible human perception of God's viewpoint. That is, the Spirit of Truth is available to and in the believer to open perceptions of truth (John 14v26, 16v13-15). This gives hope of true knowledge, but should not give rise to complacency. It might be seen as suggesting privilege for the Christian believer, and there is a measure of truth here; but it needs to be balanced by recognition that every believer is affected by both internal and external ambiguities, and that the Spirit may also be at work outside the Christian community, opening perceptions and guiding towards Truth. Thus every claim to true perception must be recognised as possibly ambiguous, whether it comes from inside or outside the confessing Christian community. It must be discussed and tested, even, and perhaps especially, when it claims divine privilege¹⁰.

The balance between the hope of knowledge and suspicion of particular pretenders to it is the way towards truth.

A.2.2 Epistemology is central to reading. How one seeks to find meaning and truth depends on how one expects to do so. The key for Tracy is that of truth as manifestation (1987, p28ff): for me, it is that of revelation. God in His essence is one who communicates

Himself: He does this through the Bible, and the reader is assisted by the Holy Spirit who enables its recognition. Similarly, because humans are made in the image of the one who created the physical order, they can recognise truths about it.

There is a divergence with Tracy here: while he would describe truth as manifestation, I would describe it as manifest. That is, while he would describe it as an event that happens to an observer (N1 on 1987, chapter 2), I would describe it as something not necessarily in the event but discovered by the observer through the event. While, then, we agree on how truth is known, we do not necessarily agree on what it is.

Although there are places where Tracy appears to accept the existence of truth that is independent of its knower (e.g. 1981, chapter 10), this is not always evident, and his language generally allows a plurality of truth as well as of knowledge. I would want to distinguish these, and to retain Polanyi's perception of the object of knowledge as real over against the knower, despite the fact that the knowledge of it is affected by the knower, and even that the object itself might be affected by the act of knowing¹¹. However, it is agreed that truth is manifest and can therefore be recognised.

The question then arises as to how truth is manifest, for the way in which manifestation occurs affects the way in which it is received¹². Tracy sees manifestation through the classics as a corollary of the way in which they are produced. They arise through the intensifications into particularity and distance described above: if this is done well, readers will recognise truth in them (1981, chapter 3.iv).

The common ground with my model is the personal involvement of the author - whether a single human being or a divine-human partnership. Personal involvement of the reader then reflects the personal nature of the texts, and hence gives ground for the perception of reading as conversation. If the text is a personal production, then it can be interrogated, suspected, loved and listened

to. If in addition the living God is using the text as a present means of communication through the Holy Spirit, the process of conversation and manifestation will be enhanced and experienced as living reality rather than academic or romantic¹³ exercise.

A.2.3 Plurality is central to Tracy's thinking, as indicated by the title of his 1987 book. He gives some attention to other religions (1987, chapter 5), but this is an extension to his main concerns, which have to do with the plurality and ambiguity of the western world within which he reads. The theologian is, for him, essentially a reader (of classics) within a particular part of that world. Theology is then the public discourse that communicates and discusses the reading (1981 part 1).

There are pluralities both of reader and of public, which can be society, academy or church (1981, chapter 1). The plural readings can only be adjudicated through conversation. This is first with other readers to decide between individual interpretations (p23ff), and is then extended to readers of other texts and particularly to inter-religious discussion (1981 chapter 11 and 1987 chapter 5). Tracy (1987 p93) offers the "analogical imagination" which can empathise with the "other" sufficiently to see similarities-in-difference as a strategy for inter-faith dialogue.

The plurality of Elswick has been central to my research. There has been reference to the plurality of "explanations" of its problems (see especially 2.5), and the central concern has been the elucidation of the plural diagnoses of Bible and Qur'an. The model of 2.1.4 was in part developed so that it could be extended to deal with the plural contexts in 2.4.3 and 2.6. The interaction strategy also affirms that conversation is the way towards truth in a complex situation.

In summary, personal conversation with texts and contexts is not the whole story. If the individual experience of manifestation becomes not only primary but also normative, the text collapses under the weight of variant subjective interpretations, and meanings are potentially

infinite. This can be avoided by conversation with other readers and other texts.

A return to Polanyi's notion of knowledge as personal rather than subjective further suggests that knowledge can be of an object outside the knower. His idea of intellectual passion (1958 p174) further demands that recognition of manifestation be in the context of a desire for universality and a testing of conclusions. The latter is partly through conversation - and this thesis is presented in the hope that others will converse with it - but other tests are also possible.

B. Assessing the study

The questions here are, first, whether I have effectively applied the methodology of 1.3 and moved forward in meeting my concerns within the system of 1.2 and, second, whether the conclusions reached are true. This includes true interpretations of text, true information about the communities, true analyses of the human condition and faithful accounts of other peoples' beliefs. "Truth" can be understood differently in these different areas, and each is subject to different tests.

Testing of ideas through interactive spirals has been a feature of the study. The results have been incorporated in the insights offered. Here, we focus on application of the methodology.

The task set was, of course, impossible. The system described in 1.2 is too complex for complete analysis, and too dynamic and lacking in control for adequate observation. Yet concerns for authentic Christian discipleship and mission were there, and Christians were seeking to respond within the complexity. The task of evaluation in the light of faithful Bible reading was urgent, even though it might be inadequately done. The tools from my experience in science and education were what I could offer, and they have proved useful despite the impossibility of applying them exhaustively. There are then limitations: they do not necessarily invalidate the study, but offer suggestions for future improvements.

B.1 Limitations in control

Although I have opted for a descriptive, personal approach to the community, there are some areas that are in principle open to more quantitative methods. These include aspects of Elswick society, the positions and attitudes of Muslim women, and the effectiveness of Christian mission. What sociological evidence is available has been used (see sections 1.2 and 2.3 of Bibliography I). Beyond that, the system is even less open to controlled or repeated experiments than the educational situations mentioned in 1.3.3.

A school environment is at least finite, the curriculum set and pupils and teachers identifiable. Of course, next year's class will be different, interactions will be different with different classes, and the teacher may change: any study is an unrepeatable special case. But it may be possible to test against similar groups and to attempt some control for variations. Elswick has larger, more fluid and more mixed communities, and a single researcher cannot access the whole community.

Further, my interests have been theological, the "curriculum" for Christian mission is at least as wide as the whole Bible, and interactions occur widely and without an organised timetable. Response times are much longer than in education: it is possible to assess class progress over a single term, while it is not easy to imagine how one might make an assessment of the spiritual state of communities even over a much longer time.

B.2 Limitations in reporting

Given more time and person-power, the educational research model would have suggested more controlled investigation into the religious lives of the Muslim women, including studies of their attitudes to Christians, to Christianity and to Christ before and after contact with Christians. The principle of interactive research would have added input from and to groups of Muslim women studying the Genesis stories, from groups of Christian women studying the Qur'anic versions, and from Christian and Muslim women reading both versions together.

Despite limitations, some experimental work has been possible. Ideas about Muslim women have been tested by discussions with Muslim women; Muslim perceptions of the Genesis chapters have been checked by inviting Muslim friends to respond to them; interpretations of Genesis have been offered for critique through preaching and discussion; and models of ministry amongst Muslims elsewhere in the U.K. have been explored. However, because this has been informal or confidential, it has not been possible to report it systematically. It may be that informal communication is better than more controlled study (see 2.5.1), but it is less open to testing.

B.3 Limitations of an individual

The reading of the Bible and the mission of the church are both essentially communal activities. I have sought to study within the context of the church, and to converse with individuals and groups. This has been useful, but the research project has nevertheless been mine and not the church's. Ideally, such studies should originate in and be carried out by groups rather than individuals.

Also ideally, at least the comparative part of the study should involve Muslims as well as Christians. As a Christian, I can choose to become a reader of the Qur'an, but I cannot comply with all the Islamic requirements for skilled reading unless I become a Muslim. Similarly, a Muslim cannot fulfil the faith requirements for understanding the Bible without becoming a Christian (see for example 2 Cor 3v14-16). In this sense, the comparative task is only possible if done by partners from both faiths.

An individual doing the comparison as part of a Ph.D. thesis is therefore limited in competency. The furthest (s)he can go is to make an honest attempt to listen to the other and to its commentators, and to listen to our own text in the context of what is heard.

B.4 Personal limitations

The listening is not without problems. Skill here includes gaining familiarity with texts and commentaries, and that has implications for language as well as thought patterns and world-views. For reading

the Qur'an in Elswick, the ideal reader would need fluency in Arabic, Urdu and Bengali, and in spoken Punjabi and Sylheti. To this would be added a thorough acquaintance with the culture and literature of the relevant parts of Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as the communities living in the U.K.. A knowledge of the different types of Islam represented would also be essential. The reader would then need fluency in Biblical languages, and familiarity with Biblical scholarship not only from western theologians but also from readers and theologians in the non-western world.

There are, perhaps, a few specialist scholars who might gain all these skills. But there are also many Christians living in contact with people of other faiths who are reading the Bible without such competence. As with the wider concern for discipleship and mission, the task of reading is being done already, despite its impossibility and the inadequacy of the readers. The present writer has offered what limited skills she has in this limited study, in the hopes that it will further understanding and faithfulness despite its inadequacies.

B.4 In conclusion

Despite such limitations, I think that progress has been made. I have identified important questions and developed a method of study. The Genesis passages have been heard and, to some extent acted upon, in the context of the Qur'anic material and of Elswick. The study has certainly affected my own understanding, local ministry and wider teaching and writing. It has given a renewed basis for understanding the world in which I live, and especially the human predicament and God's surprising unqualified commitment to the human race.

The attempt to use the models of specifying passions and commitments, teacher as observer and action research has also, I think, been worthwhile. While it has not been possible to follow it exhaustively, it has led to a conscious exploitation of the specificity of both researcher and researched, and to the interaction between research and ministry that has characterised the whole project. It is on these characteristics that any richness of insight that has developed has depended.

Testing of the insights will require the further investigations suggested in this section, and also comparison with other experiments in contextualised comparative reading. This must depend on other people as well as the present writer. In presenting this thesis, it is my hope that it will provoke a wider conversation through which insights as well as methods can be criticised, dilemmas discussed and problems pointed out. In all this, I long that the Church of Jesus Christ should continue fearlessly in its journey towards cooperating with Him in its response to people of other faiths.

I finish with the cautious optimism of Karl Popper, who has been one of the major influences on my thinking about truth and how to know it:

I believe that it would be worth trying to learn something about the world even if in trying to do so we should merely learn that we do not know much. This state of learned ignorance might be a help in many of our troubles. It might be as well for all of us to remember that, while differing widely in the little bits we know, in our infinite ignorance we are all equal. Popper 1972, p29.

And from A. Dürer, quoted by Popper (p2):

But I shall let the little I have learnt go forth into the day in order that someone better than I may guess the truth, and in his work may prove and rebuke my error. At this I shall rejoice that I was yet the means whereby the truth has come to light.

Notes on chapter 4

1. For a discussion of models of reader-response that centre on gap-filling, see Thiselton 1992 p274ff.
2. My analysis is independent of those of Pardes 1993 and Dennis 1994, which were both published after it was formulated.

3. See for example Levonian 1940, Adams 1984, Woodberry 1989b, Cragg 1986 chapter 2.
4. That he comes to such considerations only on p202 of his 208 pages suggests that he thinks them of little importance in the comparative process.
5. He also discusses analogical understandings arising from comparisons on p12.
6. Defined as "those texts that bear an excess of permanence and meaning, yet always resist definitive interpretation . . . though highly particular in their origin and expression, classics have the possibility of being universal in their effect" (p12).
7. These rules are "hard" (p19), including accurate speech, careful listening and respect, being willing to correct, defend, confront and challenge, and to change one's mind if necessary.
8. See also chapter 11 of The Analogical Imagination.
9. This is the major theme of The Analogical Imagination.
10. Clooney also notes this, 1993, p3.
11. For further discussion of epistemic and ontic models of truth, see Popper 1972, p224ff.
12. As in the different ways that Muslims and Christians approach their differently originating Scriptures. See 2.4.2.
13. For Tracy's critique of romanticism in reading, see Tracy 1987 p20-1.

Appendix I An Evangelical Statement of Faith.

CROSSLINKS, formerly the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, is the Anglican society by which the writer is now employed. It has a 1922 basis of faith from the foundation of the society and a revised statement adopted in 1986.

1922 Basis

1. Belief in the Grace of God, as manifested in the Love and Righteousness of God the Father, the Redeeming work of God the Son, and the Quickening Power of God the Holy Ghost.
2. Belief in the essential Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; His incarnation and Virgin Birth; the truthfulness of all His utterances; the sufficiency of His atoning Death; His corporeal Resurrection, Ascension and Coming Again.
3. Belief that the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament are wholly trustworthy, historically as well as in matters of faith and doctrine; that such Scripture is the unerring Revelation of God, the Rule of Faith, and the final Court of Appeal.
4. Belief that we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins; that we are called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in us; that through Grace we obey the call; that by faith only, on account of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are justified freely; that we become the sons of God by adoption, to be transformed into His image, to walk in good works, and at length to attain to everlasting felicity.
5. Belief that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world"; that His sacrifice once for all offered and accepted, can never again be repeated or re-presented; and that "there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone."
6. Belief that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only priest and mediator between God and man, and that the direct access of the soul to God is through His precious Blood without the intervention of any sacrificial priesthood.
7. Belief that the theories of Sacerdotalism concerning the mechanical conveyance of grace in Baptism, Confirmation, the Supper of the Lord, and Ordination, whether these be professed in doctrine or implied in ritual, are "grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but, rather, are repugnant to the Word of God."
8. Belief that a sacrificial priesthood has no place in the Ministry of the Church of Christ, but that such Ministry is for preaching, teaching, pastoral oversight and administration.
9. Belief that there is a distinction between the various visible Churches of Christendom and the one mystical Church of God which consists of all who are born again of the Spirit of God.
10. Belief that the Child of God is called to a life-long witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and to a humble following of Him in daily life.

1986 Statement

We stand in the succession of those who founded the Bible

Churchmen's Missionary Society and share their vision of preaching the Gospel to every creature. We endorse for ourselves their convictions as expressed in the Basis of the Society. We affirm that:

1. The books of the Old and New Testaments are God's Word written. Uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit, human authors spoke from God. The God-breathed Scriptures are therefore wholly trustworthy and free from error in both history and doctrine. Whatever Scripture, truly interpreted, is found to teach we are bound to believe and obey. It is the supreme authority for faith and conduct.

2. The Scriptures proclaim the only way of salvation. God created the world and mankind good but his image in human beings and his glory in creation have been defaced by sin. We are all under God's judgement and, being spiritually dead, are helpless to save ourselves. The one living God, eternally existing in three Persons, has acted in love for our salvation. God the Father sent the Son to be our Saviour; God the Son gave himself to redeem us; God the Holy Spirit brings us all the blessings which Christ won for us. No one can come to the Father except through the Son. There is no salvation outside of the Lord Jesus Christ as Scripture alone has revealed him in words and works.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. In the fullness of His eternal deity, our Lord Jesus became man. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, he had a perfect human nature and a truly human experience. By his sinless life and faultless teaching, he showed himself to be the spotless Lamb of God. By shedding his blood on the cross, once for all, Jesus bore in our place the judgement our sin deserves and secured eternal life for all who believe in him. By raising him bodily from the dead on the third day and by exalting him to heaven, the Father demonstrated his full acceptance of the finished work of Christ.

4. The world-wide church is the fellowship of all who trust in Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith alone. The Holy Spirit gives repentance, faith and new life, made evident by the fruit of the Spirit. The fellowship of believers is sustained primarily through the ministry of God's Word. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are covenant signs, God's promises made visible, which when rightly received, he uses to strengthen faith and pledge our blessings in Christ. According to his will, the Holy Spirit gives gifts and ministries to his people so that they may build each other up under the authority of the Word to worship and serve God and to love one another. All believers as priests have direct access to God through Christ our High Priest and there can be no other mediator.

5. God calls his church in the world to mission. As the Father sent him, so the Lord Jesus Christ sends his church into the world to make his name known: to preach the gospel of his grace; to care for the needy with a compassion like his; to promote the just standards of his kingdom and the good stewardship of his creation. As the Lord Jesus ascended, so he will return, personally and visibly, to complete God's new creation. He will judge the living and the dead, call his servants to account and receive them into his glory. We expect his coming and we obey his command. We pledge ourselves to make Christ known through the world.

Appendix II Sermons and responses.

1. Death and Enoch

Occasion: Women's coffee morning, Sunderland, a prominent member having recently died leaving teenage children.

Reading: Genesis 5

Introduction: play "The trumpet shall sound" from the Messiah. Hymn, "All creatures of our God and King".

A. Reading: background in the threat of death, apparently escaped. Read Gen 5 with comments:

v1-4 - the blessing; v5 . . . death. The serpent was wrong after all - Adam lived for 930 years, but he didn't get away with it - he died. Seth: v6-7 - the blessing; v8 . . . death. Read on, stressing "and he died", to v24 . . . at last! By walking with God, rather than hiding, Enoch escapes death. BUT v25-32 - the death pattern returns, evil grows, and everyone dies. Noah is saved, so we wonder whether all will be well. But no! Noah messes it up again, and he DIES.

B. So what?

Death in the Bible is something that happens to all of us, but it shouldn't. It's not what God wants, but what He sends in judgement.

Quote from hymn: "And thou, most kind and gentle death . . ."

This is wrong. Death is not kind or gentle. The first death was violent, fratricidal, a religious dispute. Death the result of disobedience to God.

For most faiths, death is NORMAL - part of the natural cycle of rebirth, or God's way of taking people into the eternal realm from the earthly realm.

For Christians, death is NOT NORMAL, NOT NECESSARY, AND NOT NICE.

NOT NORMAL: an intrusion into the world that God made.

NOT NECESSARY: Without sin, it does not have to happen. The fact that Enoch didn't die shows us this.

NOT NICE: ugly and painful.

C. Personal: The attraction of the way of the cross to the point that one can lose sight of the resurrection. Jesus did not die because death was a good thing but because it is a bad thing, and needed to be conquered. Lazarus (Jn 11): Jesus wept and snorted, moved by peoples' grief, but also affronted by death. SO HE REVERSED IT and raised Lazarus. Then He died himself to conquer death.

Jesus does not transform death by making it beautiful, but by taking it on. He removes the "sting": He deals with sin. Death now "leadeth home the child of God"; but not death but heaven is home.

Jesus transforms death for the believer, and for the bereft. He provided a son for His bereft mother (Jn 19v26), and can both give hope and provide for needs - yet the ugliness of death means that we can also mourn.

God's provision for me on the loss of my parents at 15. Reassurance of His care for the husband and children of the member who died. Prayer for them.

Responses: Some tears. Much appreciation of permission to grieve and assurance of hope. Several came to talk about their own bereavements.

2. Noah's sacrifice

Occasion: St Paul's Elswick, Harvest Festival family service, 6.10.91.

Reading: 2 Peter 2v4-14

Introduction: Song:

Mr Noah built an ark, the people thought it such a lark,

Mr Noah pleaded so, but into the ark they would not go.

Down came the rain in torrents (x3), and only 8 were saved.

The animals went in 2 by 2, elephant giraffe and kangaroo.

All were safely stowed away on that great and awful day.

Chorus

Whenever you see a rainbow (x3), remember God is love.

A. Wickedness. What a story for harvest! BUT appropriate for Elswick. Invitation to share wickedness witnessed this week. Report of car window broken and handbag stolen while driver and 6 year old daughter in car.

B. What should God do? After the riots, people wanted Him to judge the wicked and rescue "decent" people. 2 Pet says He can, and gives examples, especially Noah. Problem: "only 8 were saved". Would anyone who thinks they'd deserve to be one of the 8 stand up? (Noone does) Do we really want a judgement/flood?

C. God's way.

Quiz, using Gen 6 and 8, resulting in a "before" and "after" chart:

	Before	After
Humans	Bad	Bad
God	Angry and grieved	Pleased
God sends	Flood	Harvest

Questions and answers:

What made the difference? The sacrifice.

What was God thinking of when He smelt it? Food? No: Jesus.

What difference does the sacrifice make? Forgiveness.

D. Conclusion. Though we've done wrong, we can repent and accept the sacrifice. 2 Peter gives this as the reason for God's not sending another flood: He's waiting for people to repent because He loves them. Maybe He's waiting for you, because He loves you. Certainly, He wants the lads who smashed Elizabeth's window and the kids involved in the riots to repent. While He's waiting, the world is this strange mess and mixture . . . until the final "harvest", when God is going to clear it all up.

So . . . let's remember that

WE deserve the flood - not only the local criminals, BUT GOD sends the harvest instead. WHY? Because of the sacrifice

. . . and let's give thanks.

Sing Mr Noah again, but change the last chorus to:

Whenever you see the harvest, remember the sacrifice.

3. The world of nations

Occasion: Staff conference of Church Pastoral Aid Society, 16.12.93

Reading: Genesis 8v18-9v7

Question: What kind of a world do we live in?

Our newly multi-faith and multi-cultural society challenges us to re-map our world. Our creeds do not equip us: they have no room for these "others". The greatest challenge to western theology since Nicea: to christology and sociology, but also to fundamental world views. The Bible's basic map is Genesis 9-11, so should help us.

Answer: The world after the flood

* A world unmade and remade (evidence: e.g. waters 7v11, 8v2 cf 1v7) in response to sin. Modified creation blessings after the flood allow for fear, enmity, bloodshed: an ambiguous world.

* A world to which God is committed: the Noachic covenant, universality despite continued sin, choice of sacrifice rather than flood.

* An ambiguous world of nations. Noah's curse which divides and Babel's confusion and misunderstanding forms a chiasmus with the Table of Nations at its centre. The latter shows the nations as blessing, ordered by God, united in nature, with no reference to religion or race.

This is the world into which Abraham was called . . . and so are we. God "came down" at Babel in judgement: this is the world into which Jesus "came down" for salvation, and into which He will come again. The "tribes, languages, peoples, nations" refrain from Rev 5v9, 7v9, 10v11, 13v7, 14v6, 21v22-22v2.

Responses: "I realised that Jesus came to the world because it was broken"; "People need to hear this"; "The main point that came across to me is that people from other cultures and religions are, in principle, a blessing. Some of the things they do and believe may not be, but they are not per se aliens and therefore to be seen as threats or those who need to be avoided (I was thinking of Northern Ireland

and Bosnia). Another point is seeing the flood as a re-creation: another start."

4. The Table of Nations

Occasion: Westgate Rd Baptist Church (see map 2), 23.1.92, a special "multi-cultural" service. Title: Christ for all cultures.

Reading: Matthew 1-2v2

Introduction: "Culture" is not a Biblical word: "Peoples", "families" and "languages" are. They are presented in Genesis 10.

A. What is Genesis 10 there for?

- * Uniqueness.

- * The Bible's way of doing history: centrality of people and families.

- * Part of the genealogical framework of Genesis. From the beginning, God's revelation is in terms of human history and relationships.

B. What does it tell us about the peoples?

- * They are part of God's blessing. Blessing of increase through Gen 1-6. After the flood, blessing continues through Noah's sons to the peoples of Gen 9-11.

- * They are part of God's providence and ordering of the world. Patterns of repetitions, refrains and numbers. The world of peoples under the creative hand of God. This includes awkward people - the accursed Canaan, the obscure groups, the rebel Nimrod . . . and YOU.

- * Unity. All from Noah. Jews can look back to the Exodus: ALL can look back to the flood and are under the rainbow - deserving destruction, but preserved by God's choice.

- * BUT the peoples are also sinful. v32 points back to the judgement of the flood and forward to that of Babel. God's decision to refrain from destruction does not imply human improvement (8v21)!

- * The place of Israel. Not evident in Gen 10. She will come from an obscure corner - Peleg in v 25 - although there are things that look forward to her - e.g the borders of Canaan in v 19.

- * The purpose of Israel. Gen 10 as the context of Abraham's call - the peoples who are to be blessed through him.

C. Where is the blessing?

- * The life of Abraham as lacking in blessing for other nations.

- * Elsewhere in the Old Testament, there is little blessing from Israel to the nations, although some foreigners come in to share Israel's blessing. But there is promise of blessing.

So, where is it?

In Jesus. Matt 1 tells us that Jesus is a Jew . . . but in 2v2, the first people to recognise Him - as king of the Jews - are Gentiles. This is God's plan to bring blessing to all the peoples of Gen 10.

D. Personal.

- * God spoke to me through Matt 2v2: The feeling of exclusion from the church as a Jew, and from being Jewish as a Christian. If Jesus is king of the Jews, I can be BOTH. No one is excluded

from the people of God for any cultural reason.

* "BUT", you say, "I know that. There can be very few people who are as silly as you in thinking they are excluded because of their background. I don't see the problem!" That IS the problem. Many of us, although we know that we belong, do not feel it, and people are so busy treating us as "just the same" that they don't see the problem.

* Matt 1v1-17: "Jew" is not just a label: it implies a history, a people and a family. Jesus as Jew inherited the faith of Abraham, the glory of David, the ignominy of exile and the oppression of Rome. Jesus as descended from a particular human family inherited genes, joys and scandals - the foreigner, the prostitute, the adulterer. These are all part of His identity.

* And so for us, our backgrounds are part of who we are. Without them we are orphaned - this is one reason why we need to honour our parents: it is part of accepting who we are.

* What makes you feel excluded? Race? Community? Family? Class?

Eph 2v14-20 - you are included in God's new community in Christ, and will be part of the ultimate multi-cultural worshipping community in heaven - Rev 7v9-12 - with family and national identities.

* If we are to truly include one another, it will not just be a matter of singing e.g. African songs, but of accepting our African brethren with the whole of their contexts and their contributions - including the history of how our peoples have related. The word in Eph is "reconciliation", not "assimilation". Jesus often told people to "go back home". There is a sense in which we have a new common identity in CHRIST, but as He kept and acknowledged His human heritage, so do we. Muhammad called people to a new "sunna" and a new "ummah" - to a new cultural and political identity. Jesus did not.

Responses: Appreciation of the need to understand people with their contexts, and expressions of repentance for not doing so. Expressions of relief and joy from people who had felt excluded or devalued because of cultural or family background.

5. Babel

St Paul's Elswick, Pentecost Sunday 1990.

Readings: Genesis 11v1-9, Acts 2v1-14, 37.

Introduction:

Acted monologue about problems in Elswick, and the dream of having it all swept away . . . especially crime and language barriers, and starting again.

There were once some people who got the chance to do just that:

A. The Babel story:

Are they going to follow God's commandment to fill the earth, look after the animals, cultivate the ground . . .? Let's see!

* They're talking to each other. Are they discussing God's commandments and covenant? No! They're discussing making bricks.

* Are they building something for God? No! They are making a

city and a name for themselves.

* Are they going to fulfil God's command to fill the earth? No! They are going to stay together in one place.

* Are they listening to God? No! They are talking to each other.

They're not irreligious. The tower up to heaven - Babel "the door of God" - a religious flavour. This is "God up there", the tame God, who stays outside. We go to Him on our own terms, for Him to ratify our system. This doesn't work - it's wicked - it has to be stopped.

* It doesn't work. Far from reaching heaven, God has to come down to see it. They think they can build up and get His "rubber stamp". God is not like that - it's not only that their efforts are pathetic - the only way to bridge the heaven-earth divide is for God to come down.

* It has to be stopped. There is no telling how far they will go in their attempts to build life without God (contemporary examples). So God comes down, but this time in judgement. He is not a tame God.

What does God do? Sweep them away and start again? No! He's tried that, but has promised not to do it again despite continuing wickedness. He mixes them all up. Babel not the "door of God", but "mix up". They may not listen to God, but at least now they won't all be listening to each other. They can't understand each other, so they scatter - forced to fulfil at least one part of God's plan for them.

B. What can we learn?

* We can't get rid of crime and language problems. We have to fight evil, but God has promised NOT to sweep it away in another flood. We have to try and understand people, but the languages are something that God Himself has mixed up, to limit evil.

* If we could get rid of problems - or move to Ponteland - it wouldn't work. We'd do it again - build OUR homes, OUR families, even OUR churches - systems that dictate to God and so fight against Him.

C. Doom and gloom! And you thought Pentecost was happy! You were right. Babel is not the end of the story - only of the Gen 1-11 diagnosis. The GOOD news: God did not leave them in their mix up - He kept on coming. He came to Abraham, and promised blessing to all the mixed up nations. This is fulfilled in Jesus . . .

At Pentecost, God comes again in the Holy Spirit, reversing Babel:

The disciples are TOGETHER, because of Jesus.

They are given new languages so that people understand each other.

Perhaps the greatest miracle is that of HEARING - people hear and understand the message of the Gospel.

They respond by saving themselves from a wicked generation (cf Noah). Not flood waters that destroy, but baptismal waters that cleanse.

Togetherness at the end of Acts 2 - barriers are broken down.

There is one place where we can expect to get rid of evil, and to have our communication barriers broken down, and that is in Jesus. So, as we come to communion this Pentecost, let's shift our focus from Elswick to Him. And let's remember that, for all our work and fighting and witness, our dependence must be on the Holy Spirit.

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